

THE BATHS OF LUCCA

*The author dedicates these pages to the poet Karl Immermann
as a token of his fondest admiration.*

I.

As I entered Matilda's room, she had just fastened the last button on her green riding dress and was about to don a hat with white feathers. As soon as she spotted me she promptly flung the hat to the floor and came bounding toward me with her billowing golden locks – “Doctor of Heaven and Earth!” she called out, and according to custom, grabbed me by both earlobes and kissed me in the drollest and most heartfelt fashion.

“How goes it, you maddest of mortals? How glad I am to see you again! For nowhere on this earth am I likely to find a madder friend. There are lunatics and dingbats aplenty, and one often does them the honor of calling them mad. But true madness is as rare as true wisdom, it is perhaps nothing but wisdom vexed at knowing everything, including all the baseness of this world, and that, therefore, made the wise decision to go mad. The Orientals are a wise people, they honor madmen and prophets alike, but we take every prophet for a madman.”

“But, Milady, why did you not write to me?”

“I did indeed write you a long letter and addressed it to New Bedlam. But since, contrary to all reasonable suppositions, you were not there, the letter was forwarded

to St. Luce, and since you were not there either, it was sent on to a similar institution, and so it made the rounds of all the madhouses of England, Scotland, and Ireland, till it finally found its way back to me along with the remark that the gentleman to whom it was addressed hadn't yet been caught and committed. In truth, dear man, how did you manage to still be running around freely?"

"I'm a right crafty fellow, Milady. Everywhere I went, I managed to avoid the madhouse, and I figure I'll manage it in Italy too."

"Oh, my friend, you're quite safe here; since, first of all, there's no madhouse for miles about, and second, we have the upper hand here."

"We, Milady? So you count yourself as one of us? Permit me to plant a brotherly kiss on your forehead."

"Pshaw! I mean we bathing guests, of whom I am surely the most sensible – and just to give you an idea of the maddest among us, consider Julie Maxfield, who keeps insisting that green eyes signify the spring of the soul; and then there are those two young beauties –"

"English beauties, of course, Milady!"

"Doctor, what do you mean by that sarcastic tone? Have you developed such a predilection for the plump yellow macaroni faces in Italy that you no longer find the British appealing?"

"Plum puddings with raisin eyes, roast beef bosoms festooned with white horse-radish stripes, proud patty-cakes."

"There was a time, Doctor, when you would roll your eyes at the sight of a lovely English girl."

"Yes, that was then! I'm still not indisposed to sing the praises of your countrywomen; they're as lovely as suns, but suns of ice, they're white as marble, and cold as marble too – their poor admirers freeze on their icy hearts."

"Oho! I know one young gallant who didn't freeze there but leapt fresh and sprightly across the sea, and he was a great impertinent German!"

"He caught such an awful cold from the frosty British hearts that he's still sneezing."

Milady seemed piqued at my reply, she grabbed the horsewhip left lying as a bookmark in between the pages of a novel, waved it round the ears of her white hunting dog who growled softly, abruptly plucked her hat off the floor, set it at a

jaunty angle on her curly head, cast a couple of complacent looks at the mirror, and proudly proclaimed: "I am still beautiful!" But all of a sudden, as if riddled by a dark shooting pain, she stood stock-still in silent meditation, slowly peeled her white glove off her hand and held it out to me, and, promptly catching the drift of my thoughts, she said: "This hand is hardly as lovely as it was at Ramsgate, isn't that so? Matilda has suffered much since then!"

Dear Reader, one can seldom tell just by looking at a bell where its crack is, and only in the tone can you detect it. Had you heard the tone of voice in which the above words were uttered you'd know right off that Milady's heart is a bell cast in the finest metal, but a hidden crack marvelously muffles her merriest chimes and runs through her, as it were, in a secret sadness. But I love bells like that, they set off a sympathetic echo in my own breast; I kissed Milady's hand almost more ardently than before, even though its blossoming beauty had waned and here and there a vein protruded, a bit too blue, likewise suggesting that Matilda has suffered much since then.

Her eye regarded me like a wistful lonesome star in the autumn sky, and softly and fervently she said: "You seem to have but little love left for me, Doctor! For pity tinged the tear that just fell on my hand, almost like alms for the poor."

"What makes you presume to decipher the mute voice of my tears in such a niggardly fashion? I bet that white hunting dog just now nuzzling against you understands me better; he looks at me and then at you again and seems to wonder why we humans, proud masters of creation, are so very sad of spirit. Ah, Milady, only a kindred pain elicits our tears, and the fact is we each cry for our sorry selves."

"Enough, enough, Doctor. Let's be glad, at least, that we're contemporaries and that we happen to find ourselves in the same corner of the earth with our lunatic tears. How awful it would have been if you had perhaps lived two hundred years ago, as was the case with my friend Michael de Cervantes Saavedra, or even if you were to have been born a hundred years later than me, like another close friend of mine, whose name I don't even know, precisely because he will only get a name at his birth in the year 1900. But pray tell, how have you been since we last saw each other?"

"I pursued my business as usual, Milady: I rolled back the great stone. When I managed to roll it halfway up the mountain it suddenly rolled back down again,

and I had to once again try to roll it back up – and this rolling up- and downhill will keep repeating itself until I myself lie buried under the great stone and the master stonemason inscribes it with great big letters: Here rests in God.”

“Not on your life, Doctor, I won’t let you be – don’t be so melancholic! Laugh a little, or I’ll . . .”

“No, don’t tickle me; I’d rather make myself laugh!”

“So be it. I still like you just as much as I did in Ramsgate, where we first rubbed elbows.”

“And finally got closer than close. Yes, I will be merry. It is good that we found each other again, and the great German will once again take pleasure in living his life at your side.”

Milady’s eyes lit up with laughter like sunshine after a long rain, and her good mood once again burst forth, when John appeared and with a lackey’s stiff pathos announced His Excellency the Marquis Christoforo di Gumpelino.

“Bid him welcome! And you, Doctor, will meet a couple of prize members of our Bedlam bathing brotherhood. Don’t be put off by his exterior, especially not by his nose. The man possesses exceptional qualities, notably a lot of money, common sense and a mania for all the madresses of the moment; consequently he’s in love with my green-eyed friend Julie Maxfield and calls her his Juliet and himself her Romeo and declaims and sighs – and Lord Maxfield, her brother-in-law, to whom faithful Julia was entrusted by her husband, is her Argus-eyed watchman.”

It had been on the tip of my tongue to observe that Argus watched over a cow when the door burst wide open, and to my great amazement, my old friend the banker Christian Gumpel waddled in with his well-to-do smile and blessed belly. After his glimmering fat lips had sufficiently slathered Milady’s hand and spat out the usual string of questions as to her good health, he recognized me too – and we friends fell into each other’s arms.

2.

Matilda’s warning not to knock against the nose of the man was sufficiently well-founded, a little more length and he’d have surely poked my eye out with it. I don’t want to say anything bad about that nose; quite the contrary, it was of the noblest form, and in a sense it’s what gave my friend the right to add a Marquis’ title to his name. For one could tell from his nose that he came from noble stock, that he

descended from an ancient international family with which even our Lord God established nuptial ties without fear of rendering himself declass  . This family has indeed come down in the world a notch or two since then, so that, ever since Charlemagne's day, most are compelled to earn their living by peddling old pants and Hamburg lottery tickets, albeit without in the least letting up on their pride of ancestry or ever abandoning hope of recuperating their old holdings, or at least receiving adequate compensation for emigration, if ever their old legitimate sovereign fulfills his promise of restoration, a promise by which he's already led them around by the nose for two thousand years. Did their noses perhaps grow so long from being so long led around by the nose? Or are these long noses a kind of uniform whereby Jehovah, the King of Kings, might recognize his old yeomen of the guard, even if they deserted the ranks? The Marquis Gumpelino was just such a deserter, but he still wore his uniform, and it was ever so brilliant, adorned with little crosses and stars and rubies, a red coat of arms in miniature and plenty of other decorations, too.

"You see," said Milady, "that is my favorite nose and I know of no lovelier flower in all creation."

"Alas, Milady," Gumpelino cracked a hybrid smirk and smile, "I cannot lay this flower on your bosom without adding my blossoming lips and this addition may perhaps inconvenience you a bit in this balmy weather. But I bring you a no less precious flower that's rare in these parts."

With these words, the Marquis opened the paper bag he was carrying and gently pulled out a lovely tulip.

Hardly had Milady set eyes on the flower when she screamed at the top of her lungs: "Murder! Murder! Do you want to murder me? Off, off with this terrible sight!"

She carried on all the while, as though someone were dead set to do her in, held her hands in front of her eyes, ran around the room like a headless chicken, heaped curses on Gumpelino's nose and tulip, rang for her servant, stamped her feet on the ground, struck the dog with the riding whip, whereupon he yelped with pain, and as soon as John entered, she called out like Kean in the role of King Richard:

"A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!" and stormed out like a whirlwind.

"A curious woman!" said Gumpelino, in stunned amazement and still grasping

the tulip in his hand, so that he resembled the graven images on ancient Indian tombstones with lotus blossoms in their hands. But I was far more familiar with the lady and her idiosyncrasies, and tickled pink by this scene, I opened the window and called out: "Milady, what am I to make of you? Is this good sense, proper manners – above all, is this love?"

Whereupon the wild woman laughed out the following reply:

"And when I am o'horseback, I will swear
I love thee infinitely."⁴²

3.

"A curious woman!" Gumpelino repeated, as we set out to visit his two girlfriends, Signora Leticia and Signora Francesca, to whom he wished to introduce me. Since the ladies lived on a rather distant hill, I was all the more grateful for the goodness of my good-hearted friend, who evinced some difficulty in the climb and stopped, short of breath, on every incline, sighing: "Oh, Jesus!"

Lodgings in the Baths of Lucca are either located down below in a village surrounded by towering mountains, or else up above, on one of these very slopes, not far from the principle source of spring water, where a picturesque cluster of houses peer down into the lovely valley. But some of the houses lie scattered about on the distant slopes, and one must clamber up huffing and puffing through a wild paradise of vineyards, myrtle bushes, honeysuckle, laurel, oleander, geraniums and other noble blossoms and plants. I have never set eyes on a more charming valley, especially when peering down upon the village from the terrace of the upper bath, ringed by deep green cypress trees. From there you can see the bridge that fords a little river called the Lima, severing the village in two, and at both ends of which mighty waterfalls tumble into the ravine below, engendering a muffled commotion, as if it wished to say the sweetest things but could not make its message audible above the muttering echo all about.

But the principle charm of this valley lies in the fact that it is neither too large nor too small, that the soul of the spectator is not violently wrenched apart but rather left to harmoniously soak up the lovely sight, that the mountain peaks themselves, like all the Apennines, are not oddly misshapen in the Gothic mold, like the mountain caricatures and their human counterparts which we find in Ger-

man lands: quite the contrary, the Apennines' nobly rounded, lively green forms practically comprise a cultivated civilization unto itself in melodic harmony with the pale blue sky.

"Oh Jesus!" panted Gumpelino, as we reached the aforementioned cypress-covered heights, winded with climbing and already well-warmed by the morning sun, and peered down upon the village below, spotting our English friend high in the saddle, charging over the bridge like a romantic fairy tale figure and disappearing just as quickly in a dreamlike cloud of dust. "Oh Jesus, what a curious woman," the Marquis repeated several times. "In all my humdrum life I've never encountered the likes of her. Such ladies only appear in plays, and I believe only an actress like Holzbecher, for instance, could tackle the role. She has something of a forest fairy about her. Wouldn't you say so?"

"I believe you're right, Gumpelino. When I traveled with her from London to Rotterdam, the captain of the ship said she resembled a rose sprinkled with pepper. To thank him for this piquant comparison, once when finding him asleep in his cabin, she dumped an entire pepper shaker over his head, and one could no longer approach the man without sneezing."

"A curious woman!" Gumpelino repeated yet again. "As soft as white silk and just as durable, and just as steady in the saddle as me. If only she didn't ride herself ragged. Did you not see the lanky, haggard Englishman charging after her on his skinny mare, the picture of galloping consumption. The English are so mad about riding, they'll spend their last penny on a steed. Lady Maxfield's pale horse cost three hundred guldens, in louis d'or – dear God! and the louis d'or is already so strong and climbing daily in value."

"Yes, indeed, the louis d'ors are likely to become so valuable that a poor scholar like myself will no longer be able to come by one."

"You have no idea, my dear doctor, how much I'm obliged to spend daily, and I make do with a single servant, and only, when in Rome, do I hire a chaplain to look after my private chapel. Look there, here comes my Hyacinth."

The little fellow who that very moment appeared at the bend at the top of a hill would more aptly have been named for a tiger lily. He was a wobbly, walking scarlet red coat embroidered with gold braid that shimmered in the sunlight, and out of this red finery a sweaty little head peeked forth that nodded with a familiar wink in my direction. And indeed, when I took a closer look at the pallid solicitous little

face and the busily blinking little eyes I recognized someone whom I'd have sooner expected to meet on Mount Sinai than on the Apennines, and that was none other than Old Hirsch, sometime resident of Hamburg, a man who had not only made his mark as an incorruptible lottery collector, but who was likewise so knowledgeable about foot-corns and jewels that he could not only distinguish between the two, but also skillfully excise the former and precisely appraise the latter.

"I sincerely hope," said he, upon drawing closer, "that you still recognize me, even though my name is no longer Hirsch. I'm Hyacinth now, the valet of Mr. Gumpel."

"Hyacinth!" bellowed the latter in vehement dismay at the indiscretion of his servant.

"Hush now, Mr. Gumpel, or Mr. Gumpelino, or My Lord Marquis, or Your Excellenza, no need to put on airs in front of this fellow, he knows me, bought several lottery tickets from me, and I'd even swear to it that he still owes me a last installment of seven marks and nine shillings. I'm truly delighted, my dear doctor, to meet up with you here again. Do you too have leisure business here? What else is one to do here in this heat, where, furthermore, one has to keep climbing uphill and downhill! I get so tuckered out here by nightfall, as if I'd run twenty times back and forth between the Altona Gate and the Stone Gate without having earned a penny in the process."

"Oh Jesus!" cried the Marquis, "silence, silence, for heavens sake, before I find myself another servant!"

"Why be silent?" replied Hirsch-Hyacinth, "Can a man not take pleasure in speaking good German with a mug he knows from Hamburg, and so be reminded of dear old Hamburg?"

The man's little eyes got all fluttery and misty at the memory of his little foster fatherland, and sighing, he said: "What is Man! Blissfully you amble past the Altona Gate, strolling up the Hamburg Hill, and there you savor the sights, lions, goldfinches and odd-birds, monkeys and misters, you ride the carousel or rattle electric, and you think to yourself, boy, would I ever have a ball in a faraway place two hundred miles from Hamburg, in the land of lemons and oranges, in Italy! What is man! Put him in front of the Altona Gate and he dreams of distant Italy, send him to Italy and he'd rather be back at the Altona Gate! If only I were back there planted in front of the Michaelis Tower, ogling the great clock with the

golden numbers on its face, the great golden numbers I often watched glittering cheerfully in the afternoon sun – oh I'd love to cover them with kisses. So here I am in Italy where the lemons and oranges bloom; but when I see lemons and oranges growing, I think back to the Hamburg market where cartfuls of citrus fruit lie neatly stacked one on top of the other, and where you can quietly savor them without having to clamber up so many perilous hilltops and suffer so much sweaty heat. God is my witness, Mr. Marquis, sir, if it weren't for honor's sake and I wasn't dead set on bettering myself I'd never have followed you here. But that much I give you, it's an honor to be with you and an education."

"Hyacinth!" replied Gumpelino, somewhat mollified by such flattery, "Hyacinth, off with you now!"

"I know already."

"You don't know, I tell you, Hyacinth."

"I tell you, Mr. Gumpel, sir, I know. His Excellency is sending me to Lady Maxfield – you don't need to say a thing. I know the thoughts you haven't yet thought and may till your dying day never think. A servant like myself doesn't come a dime a dozen. I serve you for the honor of it and to better myself, and truly, it's an honor to serve you, and an education." Having spoken these words, he proceeded to wipe his nose with a very white handkerchief.

"Hyacinth," said the Marquis, "go now to Lady Julie Maxfield, to my beloved Julia, and bring her this tulip – and watch how you handle it, it cost me a full five paoli – and tell her."

"I know already."

"You know nothing. Tell her: the tulip is among all flowers . . ."

"I know already, with this flower you want to impart a special message to her. Every now and then for a certain lottery ticket in my stash I myself made up a motto."

"For God's sake, Hyacinth, I don't want your motto. Bring this flower to Lady Maxfield and tell her:

Like the tulip among flowers
So among cheeses is Stracchino;
But more than flowers and cheese
Do I love thee, yours truly, Gumpelino!"

“As God is my witness, sir, that’s a good one!” Hyacinth exclaimed. “No need to wink at me, Mr. Marquis, sir, what you know I know and what I know you know. And you, my dear doctor, be well! For the pittance you owe me, let’s forget it.” With these words he set out again back down the hill, forever muttering: “Gumpelino Stracchino-Stracchino Gumpelino . . .”

“He’s a trusty fellow,” said the Marquis, “else I’d have long since let him go for his lack of etiquette. No need to put on airs in front of you. You catch my drift? How do you like his livery? There’s a forty talers more worth of gold braid than in the livery of Rothschild’s lackeys. I get a great personal satisfaction out of seeing him better himself in my service. Every now and then I myself give him lessons. I often say to him: What’s money? It’s round and rolls away, but education, that’s a lasting value. Yes, indeed, Doctor, should I, God forbid, lose all my money, I’d still be a great art connoisseur, an expert in painting, music and poetry. You can bind my eyes and take me to the art gallery in Florence and every painting you put me in front of I can tell you the painter who painted it or at least the school he belongs to. Music? Stuff my ears and I can still hear every wrong note. Poetry? I know the names of all the actresses of Germany, and every poet’s name by heart. And even Nature! I journeyed a full two hundred miles, traveling day and night, just to see a single mountain in Scotland. But Italy takes the cake. How do you like this natural landscape? What a marvelous creation! Just look at the trees, the mountains, the sky, the river down there – doesn’t it all look just like a painting? Have you ever seen the like of it on stage? The very sight of it makes you a poet, so to speak. Verses leap to mind, from God knows where:

Silently, under dusk’s dark veil,
The meadow sleeps to the fading murmur of the thicket,
Silent but for the ancient ruins in the dale
Sheltering the melancholy chirp of a cricket.⁴³

The Marquis declaimed these lofty words with puffed-up emotion, while peering down, as if in ecstasy, at the brightly blooming valley below.

When once on a lovely spring day in Berlin I went strolling along Unter-den-Linden, two ladies ambled by, maintaining a lengthy silence, till one burst into a wistful sigh: "Did you ever lay eyes on such gorgeous green trees!" whereupon the other, a young thing, inquired with naive astonishment, "Mother, since when do you give a hoot about green trees?"

I feel compelled to add that, though not sheathed in silk, the two by no means belonged to the rabble, since there is no rabble in Berlin, except maybe in the highest echelons of society. But as to the naive question itself, I'll never forget it. Wherever I espy a feigned love of nature, green lies and the like, I split my sides laughing. The same sentiment stirred in me upon hearing the Marquis' declamation, and sensing the scorn on my lips, he cried out, annoyed, "Don't give me grief. You have no appreciation for the natural. You're a torn man, a torn soul, a Byron, so to speak."

Dear Reader, do you, too, belong to the flock of pious songbirds who join in the chorus of torn Byronic distraction that I've heard piped and twittered for the last ten years and even, as you just heard, echoed in the noggin of the Marquis? Oh, esteemed Reader, if you wish to lament that torn condition, then better to lament that the world itself has been torn in two. Since the heart of the poet is the hub of the world, then it must surely be torn to shreds in this terrible time. Whosoever claims that his heart is still whole merely acknowledges that he has a prosaic, cast-off, hemmed in heart. But the wretched worldwide tear of our time runs right through my heart, and for that very reason I know that the great gods have shown mercy and deemed me worthy of a poet's martyrdom.

Once the world was whole, in Antiquity and the Middle Ages; all the wars waged elsewhere notwithstanding, there was still a unity in the world and there were complete poets. We rightfully honor these poets and take pleasure in their poetry; but any aping of their wholeness is a lie, a lie that any healthy eye can see right through, and thus, justifiably worthy of scorn. Recently in the Berlin, I went to considerable trouble to find the poems of one such contemporary poet of wholeness who had complained so bitterly of my Byronic torn condition, and upon perusing a page of his mendacious greenness, and registering the gentle natural feelings that wafted at me like the scent of fresh hay, my poor heart, already torn to

tatters, almost burst with laughter, and instinctively I cried out, “My dear Captain of the Commissariat Wilhelm Neumann, since when do you give a hoot about the green trees?”

“You’re a torn man, a Byron, so to speak,” repeated the Marquis, still peering misty-eyed down into the valley, smacking his tongue a few times with reverent admiration. “Dear God, it’s all just like in a painting!”

Poor Byron! such quiet delight was denied you! Was your heart so wasted that you could only see, and even depict nature, but not be blissfully transported by it? Or was Percy Shelley right when he wrote that you’d espied nature in her maidenly nakedness, and so, like Actæon, were ripped apart by her dogs.

Enough of this; we’re getting to a better subject, namely Signora Leticia’s and Francesca’s apartments, a little white house that seemed, as it were, to be still wearing its negligee, affixed with two large red windows in front, before which the dangling vines let fall their long tendrils, so that it looked as if ample curls of green hair fell upon the eyes of the house. Eddying trills, guitar strums and laughter greeted us right merrily at the door.

5.

Signora Leticia, a fifty-year-young rose, lay in bed, trilling and chattering with her two gallants, one of whom sat on a low footstool before her, and the other reclined in a big easy chair playing the guitar. From the room next door, every now and then the shreds of a sweet song or of an even sweeter laughter streamed forth. With a certain cheap irony that sometimes betook the Marquis, he presented me to the lady and the two gentlemen, adding that I was the very same Johan Heinrich Heine, Doctor of Law, so renowned in German legal literature. Unfortunately one of the gentlemen happened to be a professor from Bologna, a legal scholar to boot, although his vaulted, well-rounded belly would have better qualified him for a position in spherical trigonometry. Somewhat disconcerted, I remarked that I did not write under my own name, but rather under the name Jarke,⁴⁴ and this I said in all modesty, as, coincidentally, one of the most wretched names of our contemporary juridical literature came to mind. The Bolognese professor regretfully confessed that he had not as yet come across the work of this celebrated name – which may likewise be the case with you, dear Reader, though he did not

doubt that the renown of said gentleman would soon spread the world over. As he spoke he leaned back in his chair, strummed a few chords on the guitar and sang an aria from *Axur*:⁴⁵

“Oh mighty Brahma!
Please let the humming
Of innocence be becoming
The humming, the humming!”

And like the sweetly teasing echo of a nightingale, a similar melody warbled forth from the room next door. In between, Signora Leticia trilled in the softest soprano:

“For you alone these cheeks do flush,
And for you, this pulse beats strong;
Infused with love’s enlivening rush
My heart heaves in this sweet song!”

And with the plumpest, most prosaic voice she added, “Bartolo, pass the spittoon.”

Whereupon Bartolo rose from the low-standing little stool, stood upright on his stiff wooden legs and respectfully proffered a somewhat insalubrious-looking blue porcelain pot.

This second gallant, as Gumpelino informed me in whispered German, was a very famous poet whose songs, while he’d written them more than twenty years ago, can still be heard all over Italy enchanting young and old with the sweet flame of love that flickers in them, even though he himself is now a poor old broken-down man with pale eyes in a wrinkled face, thin white hair on his tottering head and cold poverty in his shrunken heart. Such a poor old poet with his bald wooden way resembles the vines we see standing in winter on icy hills, barren and bereft of leaves, trembling in the wind and covered with snow, while the sweet wine that once gushed from its grapes warms some tippler’s heart in a faraway land and sweetly intoxicates. Who knows, perhaps when the winepress of thoughts,

the printing press, has squeezed the last juice out of me too and the old drained ghost can only be found in the basement at Hoffmann and Campe, I myself may be seated just as haggard and beaten as poor old Bartolo on the footstool beside the bed of an old paramour, handing her a spittoon on command.

Signora Leticia begged pardon of me to be lying in bed, belly down to boot, since an abscess on her posterior incurred from an overindulgence in figs prevented her from lying on her back as a proper lady should. She lay there something like a sphinx, supporting her prodigiously teased head of hair on both arms, between which her bosom swelled like a red sea.

"You are a German?" she inquired.

"I'm too honest to deny it, Signora!" my humble self replied.

"Oh, the Germans are honest enough!" she sighed. "But what good does it do us that the people who despoil our land should be honest! They're ruining Italy. My best friends sit in jail in Milan; the slave mongers!"

"Perish the thought," cried the Marquis. "Don't fret about the Germans, we are conquered conquerors, subjugated subjugates as soon as we set foot in Italy; and to see you, Signora, to see you and to fall to one's feet is one and the same." And spreading out his yellow silken handkerchief and kneeling down upon it, he added, "I kneel down before you and pay homage to you in the name of all of Germany."

"Christophoro di Gumpelino!" Signora sighed, deeply moved and wistful. "You may rise and embrace me!"

But to keep the gracious suitor from spoiling the hairdo and makeup of his beloved, she did not kiss him on his burning lips, but rather on his noble forehead, so that his face reached down deeper and its steering column, the nose, dipped into the red sea.

"Signor Bartolo!" I cried. "Permit me, too, to make use of the spittoon."

Signor Bartolo smiled wistfully, but did not utter a single word, even though, next to Mezzophante, he was reputed to be the best language teacher in Bologna. We are reticent to speak when speaking is our profession. He served signora as a silent knight, and only every now and then was he obliged to recite the poem that he'd composed for her twenty-five years ago for her first appearance on stage in the role of Ariadne. He himself was more than likely crowned with laurels and glowing back then, perhaps like the holy Dionysus himself, and his Leticia-Ariadne

probably leapt with Bacchanalian abandon into his blossoming arms – Evoe Bacche! In those days he composed many love poems, which, as I already mentioned, have stayed preserved in Italian literature long after the poet and his beloved have gone to waste.

For twenty-five years he remained faithful to his love, and I suppose he'll stay seated on that footstool till his dying day and recite his verses or pass the spittoon on demand. The professor of jurisprudence languishes almost as long, bound in the shackles of love to the signora. He pays court to her just as passionately as he did at the beginning of the century, is still obliged to cancel his academic lectures without fail whenever she asks him to accompany her to whatever destination, and he is still burdened with the obligations of a bona fide Patito.

The faithful endurance of these two beaux' attachment to a long-lapsed beauty may perhaps be a matter of habit, perhaps an homage to a former feeling, perhaps a function of the feeling itself completely detached from the present condition of its erstwhile object, only still beheld with the eyes of memory. So do we often notice old men on street corners in Catholic cities kneeling before an image of the Madonna so weather-beaten and faded that hardly a recognizable trace and facial feature survives, indeed, only the niche in which it was painted and the lamp dangling over it still survive. But the old people who kneel there in such profound adoration with rosary beads in their trembling hands have been doing it ever since their youth, habit drives them ever and again at the selfsame hour to the selfsame spot. They failed to notice the fading of the worshiped image, and in the end, old age makes one so feeble-eyed and blind that it makes absolutely no difference if the object of our worship is still visible or not. Those who still believe without seeing are, in any case, happier than the sharp-eyed ones who immediately notice every wrinkle marring the face of their Madonna. Nothing is more odious than such observations! Once upon a time, it's true, I believed the faithlessness of women to be the most terrible thing, and giving vent to the most terrible, I called them snakes. But oh, now I know that the worst thing is that they're not altogether snakelike, since each year snakes can shed their old skin and rejuvenate themselves with a brand new skin.

I was not able to assess whether either of the pair of antique suitors was jealous that the Marquis, or rather his nose, bobbed blissfully in the aforementioned

manner. Bartolo sat placidly on his little stool, with his sticklike legs crossed, playing with Signora's lapdog, one of those charming little creatures native to Bologna and known in Germany as a Bolognese. The Professor did not allow himself to be the least bit disturbed in his singing, which, from time to time, was met by the sweetly tittered notes of a parody emanating from the room next door; and every now and then he broke off his singsong on his own accord to annoy me with juristic issues. And whenever we did not agree in our assessments of the question at hand he strummed a few hasty chords and cited passages from the law books as proof. But I always backed up my position based on the authority of my teacher, the great Hugo, renowned in Bologna by the name of Ugone, or also Ugolino.

"A great man!" the Professor affirmed, strumming and bursting into song:

"The gentle timbre of each note
Still echoes deep inside your breast,
And the torment that it wrought
In ecstasy your heart undressed."

Even Thibaut, whom the Italians called Tibaldo, was held in high repute in Bologna, although the writings of these two gentlemen and their principle positions and counter-positions were equally unknown. Gans and Savigny were likewise known only by name. The Professor held the latter to be a learned lady.

"Is that so?" said he, when I enlightened him as to his easily pardonable error. "No lady, I'll be darned. So I was ill-informed. I was even told that Signor Gans once invited this damsel to dance with him at a ball, was refused, from which he derived their literary enmity."

"In truth, you've been ill-informed, Signor Gans does not even dance, 'tis his philanthropic inclination thereby to avoid setting off an earthquake. This invitation to dance is probably a misinterpreted allegory. The historical and the philosophical schools are conceived as dancers, and in this sense we might well imagine a Quadrille danced by Ugone, Tibaldo, Gans and Savigny. And it might well be said that Signor Ugone, though a limping devil of jurisprudence, does a right graceful turn with Lemiere, and that Signor Gans recently attempted several mighty leaps that caused him to be dubbed the Hoguet⁴⁶ of the philosophical school."

"I see," the Professor corrected himself, "so Signor Gans only dances allegorically, so to speak, metaphorically." But then all of a sudden, instead of uttering another word, he once again reached for the guitar and strummed and sang like mad:

"'Tis true, indeed, his precious name
Is the rapture of all hearts.
Loudly storm the ocean waves,
And the sky grows dark and grave,
Tarar, Tarar, cry the storm clouds,
As if the earth and heavens bowed
Before the hero's name."

As to Herr Göschen, the Professor did not even know that he existed. But this has its perfectly natural explanation, in that the fame of the great Göschen had not yet made its way to Bologna, but only to Poggio, still a good four German miles short of town, where said reputation may yet wile a while. Göttingen itself is hardly as famous in Bologna as one might be inclined to expect, if only for gratitude's sake, since it likes to call itself the German Bologna. Whether this designation is apt I cannot say; but, in any case, the two universities can be distinguished by the simple fact that Bologna has the smallest dogs and greatest scholars, whereas Göttingen, on the other hand, has the smallest scholars and the biggest dogs.

6.

When the Marquis Christophoro Gumpelino withdrew his nose from the red sea like the late King Pharaoh, his face glistened in sweaty bliss. Deeply moved, he gave Signora his promise that, once she was able to sit again, he would personally accompany her to Bologna in his own carriage. Whereupon it was arranged that the Professor would journey on ahead, that Bartolo, on the other hand, would ride along in the Marquis' carriage, where he might sit beside the driver with the little dog in his lap, and that, in a fortnight, they'd finally reach Florence, where Signora Francesca, who was to accompany Milady to Pisa, would in the meantime have likewise returned. While the Marquis calculated the expenses of this journey on

his fingers, he hummed to himself “*Di tanti palpiti*.”⁴⁷ The Signora interspersed this rendition with piercing trills, and the Professor feverishly strummed his guitar and sang such glowing lyrics that drops of sweat fell from his brow and tears ran from his eyes, joining into a single current streaming down his red face. In the midst of this singing and strumming, the door to the next room suddenly burst open and in trod a striking person –

Oh ye muses of the Old and New World, and even you as yet undiscovered muses whom future generations will revere, whose existence I had long ago divined in the forest and in the sea, I implore you, give me the colors wherewith to paint this person, who next to virtue is the loveliest thing in the world. It is self-evident that virtue is the first of all splendors, the Creator adorned it with so many charms that it seemed as if he could nevermore bring a thing so lovely into being; but then he gathered all his strength again and at a propitious moment he created Signora Francesca, the lovely dancer, the greatest masterpiece next to virtue, and in whose creation he had not in the least repeated himself, as do mortal masters in whose later works the borrowed charms of earlier canvases shine forth again. Nay, Signora Francesca is utterly original, she does not bear the slightest resemblance to virtue, and there are connoisseurs who consider her equally lovely, and merely grant precedence to virtue on account of its seniority. But can it be considered a failing for a dancer to be some six thousand years too young?

Dear God, I see her again, bursting through the door, leaping into the middle of the room, at the same time pirouetting untold times on one foot, then flinging herself lengthwise on the sofa, covering her eyes with both hands and crying out breathlessly, “Oh, I’m so tired of sleeping!” Now the Marquis approaches and launches into a protracted discourse in his ironic, long-winded, reverential manner, which, given his abrupt way of peppering his rapture with matters of business and his tiresome unctuousness in the face of sentimental stimulation, makes for a curiously disjunctive effect. And yet this manner was not unnatural, it may well have evolved in him quite naturally, insofar as he lacked the daring to unabashedly give vent to that sense of superiority to which he felt justified by money and intellect, which is why he sought to sheepishly mask it in the most humble words. His broad smile at such times was unpleasantly toothsome and one didn’t know whether to respond with slaps or applause. In this manner he delivered his

morning oratory to Signora Francesca, who, still half-asleep, hardly listened, and when, to cap it all off, he begged to be allowed to kiss, if not both, then at least her left foot, in preparation for which he painstakingly spread out his yellow silk handkerchief on the ground and knelt down upon it, she indifferently extended her left foot, stuck in the loveliest red shoe, in his direction, while the right foot was girded by a blue shoe, a droll coquetry intended to make all the more apparent the delicate, dainty shape of her feet. Once the Marquis had reverentially kissed the little foot, he rose with a moaning "Oh, Jesus!" and begged leave to introduce me, his friend, which request was likewise accorded with a yawn. Whereupon he showered me with profuse praises extolling my excellent qualities and, on his word of honor, swore that I had celebrated ill-starred love in the most splendid verse.

I likewise bid the lady grant me the privilege of kissing her left foot, and just as I partook of this honor she suddenly roused herself as if out of a waking dream, bent down to me with a smile, studied me with big, bedazzled eyes, leapt up joyfully, landing in the middle of the room, and once again spun around countless times on one foot. I felt wonderful, as my heart steadfastly spun along, till I almost grew dizzy. At the same time the Professor strummed merrily on his guitar and sang:

"An opera diva did decide
To wed me, and so became my bride.
But as soon as we were man and wife,
Heaven help me, what a life!

Pirates took her off my hands,
Then I sold her on demand,
But before she could go wrong
My darling diva burst into song!"

Whereupon Signora Francesca studied me again from head to foot, and with a look of satisfaction thanked the Marquis, as if I were a present that he had been so kind as to bring her. She found little to object to, save that my brown hair was a bit too light, she'd have wished it darker, like the hair of the Abbot Cecco, and my eyes were too small for her liking and more green than blue. As retribution,

dear Reader, I ought now to depict Signora Francesca with all her flaws; but truth to tell I find nothing to fault in this delightful, almost frivolously formed figure as lovely as one of the Graces. Her face was also altogether godlike, of the sort one finds in Greek statues, her forehead and nose made one perfectly straight vertical line, which with the lower line of the nose formed a wondrously short, lovely right angle, and just as short was the distance between nose and mouth, whose lips hardly reached from end to end, and wore a dreamlike smile, beneath which arched a dear rounded chin, and the neck – dear God! Pious Reader, I go too far, and besides, I have no right in this inaugural depiction to speak of the two silent flowers that peeked forth like pale poesy when Signora undid the silver collar button of her black silken gown – dear Reader! Let us climb back to our depiction of the face, of which I have yet to add, as an afterthought, that its complexion was clear and pale yellow like amber, that the black hair that covered her temples in glimmering flat ringlets gave her face a childlike roundness, illumined as if by an enchanted light that shimmered unexpectedly from her two black eyes.

You see, dear Reader, I would gladly provide you with a detailed local description of my joy, and as other travelers supplement their works with special maps of historically significant or otherwise remarkable regions, I would like to have Francesca etched on a copper plate and supplement the print. But oh, what's the use of a dead copy of the external outline of a shapely figure whose godly charm is evident in live motion. Even the finest painter cannot make us perceive this, for painting is, after all, nothing but a flat lie. The sculptor might be better able to do so; variant lighting permits us to vaguely divine the movement of shapes in statues, and the torch that casts external light on them likewise appears to illuminate them from within. There is, indeed, a statue, dear Reader, that may give you a marble approximation of Francesca's loveliness, and that is the Venus by the great Canova, which you can find in one of the last halls of the Pitti Palace in Florence. I often think of this statue now, at times I imagine her lying in my arms, gradually coming to life and whispering nonstop in Francesca's voice. But it was the sound of that voice that graced each of her words with the loveliest and most profound meaning, and if I related her words it would only give you a dry herbarium of dead flowers whose priceless value is limited to their scent. Indeed, she often leapt into the air and danced as she spoke, and perhaps the dance itself was her real language. But my heart kept right on dancing along, executing the most difficult steps, and,

thereby, demonstrating a talent for ballet which I'd never have put past it. In this manner, Francesca also told the story of the Abbot Cecco, a young lad who was in love with her when she still wove straw hats of reeds from the Arno Valley, and she assured me that I had the good fortune to resemble him. As she spoke she performed the most delicate pantomimes, kept pressing her fingertips to her heart, appeared then with the hollow of her palm to draw out the most delicate feelings, finally flung herself with a heartfelt light elastic leap onto the sofa, hid her face in the pillow, raised her feet in the air behind her and let them act like wooden dolls. The blue foot was supposed to represent the Abbot Cecco and the red one poor Francesca, and in her parody of her own story she had the two loving feet take their leave of one another. It was a touchingly delirious spectacle to see the two kiss with their slipper tips, whispering the gentlest endearments – and all the while the mad girl shed delightfully tittering tears, which, from time to time, unconsciously tapped a deeper, more soulful note than the role prescribed. In her comic high-spirited lament, she also let the Abbot Cecco deliver a lengthy discourse in which he praised the beauty of poor Francesca with a string of pedantic metaphors, and the way in which she replied as poor Francesca, mimicking her own voice in the sentimental manner of a bygone era, had a wistful doll-like quality that moved me deeply. *Adieu, Cecco! Adieu, Francesca!* went the refrain. The loving little feet did not want to part – and I was glad when merciless fate finally tore them apart, as a sweet presentiment told me that it would be a misfortune for me if the two lovers had remained united forever.

The Professor expressed his approval with waggish strums on his guitar, Signora trilled, the little dog barked, the Marquis and I clapped like wild, and Signora Francesca stood up and took a grateful bow. “It really is a lovely comedy,” she said to me, “but it’s such a long time ago that it was first staged, and I’ve grown so old – go ahead, guess how old I am!”

She did not, of course, expect an answer, and hastened to reply, “Eighteen years old,” pirouetting a full eighteen times around on her foot. “And how old are you, Dottore?”

“I, Signora, was born on New Year’s eve 1800.”⁴⁸

“I already told you,” the Marquis interjected, “he is one of the first men of our century.”

“And how old do you suppose I am?” Signora Leticia suddenly piped in, where-

upon, mindless of bearing her birthday suit, till now hidden under the blanket, she proceeded to raise herself bolt upright so that not only the red sea, but also all of Arabia, Syria and Mesopotamia were brought to light.

Whereupon, in the face of this frightful spectacle, I staggered back, stammered a few banalities about the difficulties of responding to such a question, having only taken in her top half; but as she pressed me all the more insistently for an answer, I confessed the truth, namely that I was not yet able to calibrate the relationship between the Italian and the German year.

“Is the difference very great?” asked Signora Leticia.

“It is a function of the fact,” I replied, “that heat expands all things, therefore the years in balmy Italy are much longer than those in chilly Germany.”

The Marquis readily rescued me from my embarrassing dilemma by gallantly declaring that her beauty had only now reached its ripest state. “And Signora!” he hastened to add, “just as the cumquat yellows with aging, so does your beauty ripen with each successive year.”

The lady appeared to be pleased with this comparison and likewise confessed that she did, indeed, feel riper than ever, particularly more so than back then, when she was still a skinny thing and first performing in Bologna, and that she could still not fathom how with such a skinny figure she could have made such a big splash. Whereupon she told of her debut as Ariadne, to which, as I later discovered, she often referred back, and on which occasion Signor Bartolo had to recite the poem he’d written for her that catapulted her into stardom. It was a good poem, full of stirring sadness at Theseus’ unfaithfulness, full of blind rapture at Bacchus and florid glorification of Ariadne. “Bella cosa!” cried Signora Leticia at every verse, and I too was obliged to praise the imagery, the poetic structure and the entire treatment of the myth.

“Yes, it is beautiful,” said the Professor, “and it is undoubtedly based on a historic truth, just as some authors tell that Oneus, a priest of Bacchus, married the mourning Ariadne when he found her abandoned on Naxos; and as often happens, the priest of the god in the legend was himself transformed into the god.”

I could not concur with this opinion, since concerning mythology I am rather inclined to the historical explanation, and so I replied, “In Ariadne’s flinging herself into Bacchus’ arms, after having been abandoned on Naxos by Theseus, I see

nothing other than the allegory of Ariadne's state, in that, finding herself callously abandoned, she gave herself over to drink, a hypothesis I share with a number of learned scholars in my fatherland. As you, sir Marquis, surely know, the late banker Bethmann, in line with this hypothesis, had his Ariadne lighted such that she appeared to have a red nose."

"Yes, indeed, Bethmann in Frankfurt was a great man!" cried the Marquis; yet at that same moment an important thought seemed to cross his mind; with a sigh of dismay he said to himself: "Oh my God, I forgot to write to Rothschild in Frankfurt!" And with a serious businessman's expression, from which any sense of lighthearted parody appeared to have vanished, he promptly excused himself without a big to-do, and promised to be back that evening.

Once he was gone and, as is customary in worldly company, I was about to make light of the man through whose kind introduction I had made the most pleasant acquaintance, I found, to my surprise, that everyone kept praising him to the hilt, lauding, in particular, and in the most exaggerated terms, his enthusiasm for beauty, his refined noble manners and his utter unselfishness. Even Signora Francesca joined in singing his praises, though she did confess that she found his nose a bit intimidating and that it reminded her of the Tower of Pisa.

Upon taking my leave I once again requested permission to kiss her left foot, whereupon in jesting earnest she removed the red shoe as well as the stocking; and as I knelt down before her, she extended the white blossoming lily-foot, which I proceeded to press to my lips doubtlessly more piously than I'd have done with the foot of the Pope. Needless to say, I also played lady-in-waiting and helped her slip back into the stocking and shoe.

"I'm well pleased with you," remarked Signora Francesca upon the completion of my task, at which I took my sweet time, though all ten fingers were actively engaged – "I'm well pleased, indeed, you have my leave to slip on my stockings more often. Today you kissed my left foot, tomorrow I will proffer the right. The day after tomorrow you may kiss my left hand and the day after that my right. Conduct yourself with dignity and I will one day offer you my mouth, etc. As you can see, I'm inclined to let you advance, and since you're young you may well go far in this world."

And I did indeed go far in this world! To that you were witnesses, oh Tuscan

nights, with your light blue sky studded with great silver stars, and consider your wild laurel bushes and sheltering myrtle, and you, oh nymphs of the Apennines, who swirled around us in your bridal dances and dreamed yourselves back to the sweeter days of the gods, before the advent of the gothic lie that only tolerates blind, groping pleasures in the dark and slaps its hypocritical fig leaf on every frank and open feeling.

No additional fig leaves were needed, for a rustling full-grown fig tree with leafy outstretched branches crowned the heads of the blissful below.

7.

What a beating is we already know, but nobody has yet established what love is. A few natural philosophers have maintained it's a kind of electricity. That is possible, since at the moment of falling in love we feel as if an electric flash suddenly leapt from the eye of our beloved and struck us in the heart. Oh, these bolts are the most perilous, and if anyone ever invents a lightning rod to protect against them I will honor him more than Franklin. If only there were little lightning rods one could wear on one's heart attached to a weather vane that could deflect the terrible flame and send it in some other direction! Yet I fear that it is far more difficult to deprive little Cupid of his arrows than to steal Jupiter's lightning or the scepter of tyrants. Besides which, not every love strikes like lightning; sometimes it lurks like a snake among roses, waiting for the first breach in the heart's defenses to leap in; sometimes it's only a word, a look, the account of an unlikely action that drops like an airborne seedling into our heart, lies dormant all winter long, till spring comes and the little seedling explodes into a flaming flower whose scent intoxicates the head. The same sun that incubates crocodile eggs in the Nile River Valley can at the very same moment ripen unto bursting the love seed in a young heart in Potsdam on the Havel – then come the tears in Egypt and Potsdam. But tears are still by no means an adequate explanation for what love is. Has no one fathomed its essence? Has no one solved the riddle? Perhaps such a solution would cause greater torment than the riddle itself, and the heart would be petrified and freeze in horror, as at the first sight of Medusa. Snakes curl around that terrible solution to the riddle. Oh, let me never know that key word, I still prefer by far the burning misery in my heart to a freezing of sensation. Oh, speak it not, you departed souls that amble

painlessly as stone, but also insensate as stone, through the rose gardens of this world, and with pale lips sneer at this poor fool who prizes the scent of roses and dreads the prick of thorns.

But even if I can't tell you, dear Reader, what love actually is, I could still relate in considerable detail how you act and how you feel when you've fallen in love in the Apennines. You act just like a lunatic, you dance over hills and on the sheer face of cliffs, convinced that the whole world is dancing with you. You feel as if the world had only been created this very day and you are the first living soul. How splendid it all is! I shouted for joy upon leaving Francesca's house. How beautiful and precious is this new world! I felt as though I had to give every plant and animal a name, and I named everything in accordance with its inner nature and my own perceptions that were so wondrously in accord with external things. My breast was a well of revelation and I fathomed all forms and formations, the scent of the plants, the song of the birds, the whistling of the wind and the roar of the waterfalls. At times I even heard the voice of God: "Adam, where are you?" "Here I am, Francesca," I called back, "I worship you, as I know for sure that you created the sun, the moon and the stars and the earth with all its creatures!" Then the myrtle bushes emitted a giggle, and I sighed to myself: "Oh sweet illusion, forsake me not!"

Later, at twilight, that's when the lunatic bliss of love really set in. The trees on the mountains no longer danced alone, but the mountains themselves pranced about with their heavy heads so drenched with the red of the setting sun it was as if they'd gotten drunk on their own grapes. The stream below rushed all the more hastily away and surged in terror as if it feared that the enraptured reeling peaks would tumble to the ground. And all the while the last light glimmered as sweetly as kisses. "Look," I cried, "the laughing sky is kissing its beloved earth – oh Francesca, lovely sky, let me be your earth! I am so very earthy and long for you, my sky!" That's what I cried out, pleading with outstretched arms, and ran with my head against some trees, which I proceeded to embrace, not to curse, and, love-drunk, my soul shouted for joy, when all of a sudden I espied a scarlet figure that violently tore me out of all my dreams and restored me to chilly reality.

On an outcropping of grass beneath an overarching laurel tree sat Hyacinthos, the Marquis' servant, and beside him sat his master's dog Apollo. The latter stood, to be precise, with his forepaws propped up on the little man's scarlet knees, watching with rapt attention as the servant, clasping a writing tablet in his hands, from time to time scribbled something with a wistful smile on his lips, shook his little head, heaved a deep sigh, and then wiped his nose, well-pleased.

"Well I'll be damned," I cried out to him, "Hirsch-Hyacinthos, are you composing poems? The omens augur well, Apollo sits at your side and your head is already crowned with laurels."

But I did the poor rascal an injustice. He replied right amiably: "Poems? Not a chance, I'm fond of poems, but I certainly don't write them. What should I write about? It's just that I had nothing to do, so I amused myself compiling a list of the names of those friends who once bought lottery tickets from me. Some of them, in fact, still owe me a bit – please don't think, Doctor, that I am demanding payment – there's time enough, you're good for the debt. If only the last time you'd played 1365 instead of 1364, you'd now be a wealthy man with one hundred thousand marks in cash, wouldn't have to run around here and could sit quietly and contentedly in Hamburg and could, while reclining on a sofa, have someone tell you what it's like in Italy. As God is my witness, I would never have come here were it not to please Mr. Gumpel. Heaven help me, how much heat and danger and fatigue must I endure, and wherever there's something to get overexcited or to rave about Mr. Gumpel's on hand and I have to come along too. I'd have left him long ago if he could do without me. For who else is there to sing his praises back home and tell how much honor and cultivation he acquired in foreign lands? And if the truth be told, I myself am starting to put store in cultivation. Back home in Hamburg, thank God, I have no use for it; but you never know when you might go someplace else where it'd come in handy. It's a whole different world nowadays. And it's true, a little bit of culture embellishes one's whole person. And what honor you get out of it! Lady Maxfield, for instance, the way she received me and honored me this morning! Like I was her equal. And she gave me a francesconis tip, even though the flower only cost five paoli. On top of which it's a real pleasure to have a lady's little white foot in your hands."

I was more than a little bit taken aback by this last remark and thought to myself, *Is he teasing me?* But how could that lout already know of the joy I only first experienced that very day, at the same time as he was on the far side of the mountain? Might a similar scene have taken place there, and did this reveal the ironic talent of the great internationally acclaimed dramatist in the sky, that he would perhaps stage a thousand suchlike scenes, one simultaneously parodying another, for the amusement of the heavenly hosts? In the meantime, I learned that both suspicions were unfounded, since after long and repeated questioning, once I'd given my word of honor not to betray his confidence to the Marquis, the poor man confessed to me. Lady Maxfield still lay in bed when he came by with the tulip, and at the very moment when he was going to deliver his lovely prepared speech, one of her naked feet happened to slip out from under the covers, and since he spotted foot corns on it he promptly requested permission to cut them off, which permission was granted, after which, for that service and for having delivered the tulip, he was rewarded with a francesconis.

"Still, all that matters to me is the honor," Hyacinth added, "which is just what I said to Baron Rothschild when I had the honor of cutting his corns. The operation took place in his office; he was seated on a green settee, as though on a throne, spoke like a king, was surrounded by his courtiers, and he gave his orders and sent messengers to all the other kings; and while all this was happening, as I was cutting his corns, I thought to myself, *You hold in your hands the foot of the man who himself at this very moment holds the rest of the world in his hands, you too are now an important person, and if you cut the slightest bit too sharply down below he'll get vexed and take a greater cut out of the great kings up above.* It was the happiest moment of my life!"

"I can well imagine this glorious feeling, Mr. Hyacinth. But which member of the Rothschild dynasty did you thuswise amputate? Was it perchance the magnanimous Brit, the man on Lombard Street who built a rental unit for emperors and kings?"

"Naturally, my dear doctor, I mean the great Rothschild, the great Nathan Rothschild, Nathan the Wise, with whom the Emperor of Brazil pawned his diamond crown. But I also had the honor of making the acquaintance of Baron Salomon Rothschild in Frankfurt, and even if I did not have the pleasure of contact with

his bare foot, he still respected me. When the Marquis told him that I was once a lottery salesman, the Baron replied with a wink, 'I myself am something like that. I am, after all, the senior collector of the Rothschild lottery, and my dear colleague must on no account dine with the servants, he must sit beside me at table.' And by the grace of God, Doctor, I sat next to Salomon Rothschild at table, and he treated me just like his equal, altogether *familionaire*. I also went with him to the famous Children's Ball they wrote about in the newspaper. So much splendor I never expect to see again in my life. I also once attended a ball in Hamburg that cost a full fifteen hundred marks and eight shillings, but that was nothing but a little heap of chicken droppings as compared to a veritable mountain of garbage. You can't imagine how much gold, silver, and diamonds I saw there! How many medals and decorations! The Falcon's Order, the Order of the Golden Fleece, the Lion's Order, the Eagle's Order – why there was even a mere tike, a mere tike I tell you, who wore the decoration of the Elephant's Order. The children were all masked and played pretend, all dressed like kings, with crowns on their heads, but one big boy dressed exactly like old Nathan Rothschild. He pulled it off wondrously well, kept both his hands in his pants pockets, stuffed and jingling with coins, shook himself in displeasure when one of the little kings wanted to borrow a bit, and it was only the little fellow with the white coat and red pants whom he coddled, stroking his cheeks and whispering praise, 'You're my *plaisir*, my favorite, my prize prince, but tell your cousin Michael to get lost, I'll never lend that lunatic a dime, a fellow who pisses away more in a day than his yearly allowance; he'll be the cause of a calamity some day soon, and my business will bear the brunt.' As God is my witness, that boy really pulled it off, especially when he lent his arm for the fat kid to lean on, the one wrapped in satin embroidered with genuine silver lilies, and said to him from time to time, 'Now, now, you'd best behave yourself, do the right thing, we wouldn't want them to chase you away again and me lose to my investment.' I assure you, Doctor, it was a pleasure to hear that boy speak; and all the others too, dear kids the lot of them, carried it off splendidly, until it was time for cake and they fought over the best piece and tore the crowns from their heads, screaming and crying, and some went so far as to . . ."

There's nothing more boring on this earth than to have to read the description of an Italian journey, except maybe to have to write one – and the writer can only make it halfway bearable by speaking as little as possible of Italy itself. Even though I've fully respected this dodge, I can't promise you, dear Reader, much entertainment in the next few chapters. If you get bored with all the noisome stuff about to transpire here, console yourself and have pity on me, for I'm the one who had to write it. I recommend you skip a couple of pages every now and then, that way you'll get to the end all the quicker – oh, if only I could do the same! Just don't think I'm joking; if you want my heartfelt opinion of the book, I'd suggest you shut it now and don't read on. Next time I'll write you something better, and if in some future book we once again encounter Matilda and Francesca in the City of Lucca, I hope you'll find the dear depictions all the more delightful than this chapter and those that follow.

Thank God, at this very moment an organ grinder is playing merry melodies outside my window! My sorry spirit needs such cheering up, especially since I now have to describe my visit with his Excellency, the Marquis Cristoforo di Gumpelino. I want to deliver this stirring account verbatim, in all its sordid splendor.

It was already late when I reached the lodgings of the Marquis. As I entered the room, Hyacinth stood there alone polishing the golden riding spurs of his master, who, as I could see through his half-opened bedroom door, was kneeling before a Madonna and a large crucifix.

For you must know, dear Reader, that the Marquis, that noble gentleman, is now a good Catholic, that he strictly practices all the ceremonies of the one true faith, and even, when in Rome, hires his own private chaplain, for the very same reason that, when in England, he puts his money on the best racehorses and, in Paris, on the prettiest dancers.

"Mr. Gumpel is currently engaged in prayer," Hyacinth whispered with a suggestive smile, and, pointing in the direction of his master's bedroom, he added in a still softer whisper, "He kneels like that every evening for a full two hours in adoration before the primadonna with the Christ child. It's a precious painting that cost him six hundred francesconis."

“And you, Mr. Hyacinth, why aren’t you on your knees behind him? Or are you perhaps not favorably inclined to the Catholic religion?”

“I’m favorably inclined and then again not so favorably inclined,” he replied with a skeptical shake of the head. “It’s a good religion for a noble baron who can afford to spend the whole day doing nothing, and for an art connoisseur, but it’s no religion for a Hamburger, for a man engaged in business, and absolutely not for a lottery salesman. I’ve got to note down precisely every number picked, and if my mind should be distracted, *boom! boom! boom!*, by a Catholic church bell, or my vision blurred by Catholic incense, and I put down a wrong number, it would cause the most terrible calamity. I’ve often said to Mr. Gumpel: ‘Your Excellency is a rich man and can afford to be Catholic as much as you like, and can let your powers of reason get all smoky and let yourself get as dumb as a Catholic bell, and you still have enough to eat; but I am a businessman and have to keep my wits about me to get by.’ Mr. Gumpel says it’s essential for good breeding, and if I don’t become Catholic I’ll never understand the paintings that go with good breeding, not Whatshisname of Asseasy, Correggio, Carraccio, Caravaggio – but I always figured that Correggio and Carraccio and Caravaggio can’t do me a bit of good if nobody buys my lottery tickets and I go dead *brokio*. On top of which, Doctor, I must confess that the Catholic faith is no fun, and as a reasonable man, you must agree. I see no pleasure in a religion in which our dear God, God help us, is dead, and it smells of incense just like at a funeral, and the whole business is accompanied by funereal drones enough to make you downright melancholy – I tell you, it’s no religion for a Hamburger.”

“But what do you think of the Protestant religion, Mr. Hyacinth?”

“That one, on the other hand, Doctor, is altogether too sensible for me, and if they didn’t play an organ in the Protestant church it wouldn’t be a religion at all. Between you and me, it’s a harmless religion, as clean as a glass of water, but it doesn’t do you any good either. I tried it once, and the experiment cost me four marks, fourteen shillings.”

“How so, my dear Mr. Hyacinth?”

“See, Doctor, I always thought: Now there’s a downright enlightened religion, and it’s lacking in ecstasy and miracles; but still, it’s got to have a pinch of ecstasy, and really ought to be able to pull off a teensy weensy miracle if it means to parade

around as a proper religion. But who could ever pull off a miracle in such a place, I thought, when once I visited a Protestant church in Hamburg, one of the barest sort with nothing but brown benches and white walls and not a stitch hanging on the walls but a little black tablet with a half a dozen white numbers on it. Then I thought to myself, hold on, you're being unfair to this faith, for all I know these numbers can just as soon pull off a miracle as a picture of the Mother of God or one of her husband, Saint Joseph's bones, and to put it to the test, I went straight to Altona and put my money on these very numbers in the Altona Lottery, eight shillings on the double, six on the triple, four on the quadruple and five on the quintuple – but I swear to you, on my word of honor, not a single one of those Protestant numbers won. Now I knew what to think; I thought to myself, you can keep your religion that can't do a thing, not even make me win a double – you think I'd be daft enough to bet it all on a religion on which I already lost four marks and fourteen shillings?"

"The old Jewish faith no doubt seems more expedient to you, my friend?"

"You can keep your old Jewish faith, Doctor, I wouldn't wish it on my worst enemy. Gives you nothing but scorn and shame. I tell you, it's no religion at all, just a lot of hard luck. I try to avoid anything that could remind me of it, and since Hirsch is a Jewish word and means Hyacinth in German, I even gave old Hirsch his walking papers and now sign my name: 'Hyacinth, Collection Agent, Operator Extraordinaire, and Taxator.' Fortunately, my signet ring already has an H on it and I don't have to get a new one engraved. I assure you, your name matters a whole lot in this world, your name is everything. When I sign: 'Hyacinth, Collection Agent, Operator Extraordinaire, and Taxator,' it sounds altogether different than if I'd just signed Hirsch, and nobody can treat me like a common ragamuffin."

"My dear Mr. Hyacinth! Who would ever treat you like that! You already seem to have done so much for your cultivation that the cultivated gentleman in you leaps out at one before you open your mouth to speak."

"You're right on that account, Doctor, I've made colossal strides forward in my cultivation. I don't rightly know when I get back to Hamburg with whom I'm going to hobnob, but as far as religion is concerned I know what I'll do. For the time being at least I can still make do with the new Israelitic Temple; I mean the pure mosaic

service with prayers in German spelling and stirring sermons and even a couple of ecstatic words that no religion can do without. As long as God does good by me, I can't ask for any better religion for myself, and this one definitely deserves my support. I plan to do my part, and as soon as I'm back in Hamburg, every Saturday, as long as there's no lottery drawing, I'll go to the brand new temple. There are, alas, some people who stain the reputation of this new Israelitic service, and maintain, with all due respect, that it may spark a schism – but I can assure you it's a good clean religion, perhaps a bit too good for the common man, for whom the old Jewish religion may still be very useful. The common man must have some foolishness in which he takes comfort, and he takes comfort in his foolishness. And an old Jew with his long beard and torn robe who can't utter a single orthographically correct word, and is even a bit scabby, may very well be at greater peace with himself than I with all my cultivation. Back in Hamburg, in a dingy room on the Bäckerbreitengang, there lives a man named Moses Lump, also known as Moses Little Lump or just plain Little Lump; all week long he runs around in all kind of wind and weather with his pack on his back to earn a few miserable marks; when he gets home on Friday night, he finds the candelabra with the seven candles lit, the table set with a white tablecloth, and he sheds his heavy pack and his cares and sits down to table with his crooked wife and even more crooked daughter, eats fish with them cooked in a nice white garlic sauce, sings a couple of splendid songs about King David, rejoices from the bottom of his heart about the exodus of the Children of Israel out of Egypt, likewise rejoices in the fact that all no-goodniks who did them evil finally perished, that King Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Haman, Antiochus, Titus and the like are dead, but that Little Lump is alive and well and can eat his fish with wife and child. And I tell you, Doctor, the fish are delicious and the man is happy, he need not torment himself with self-cultivation, he sits content in his religion and his green dressing gown like Diogenes in his barrel, he takes pleasure in the light of his candelabra which he himself doesn't have to polish – and I tell you, even if the candelabra burns a bit dimly and the hired hand who's supposed to keep it spotless isn't at hand, and Rothschild the Great happened by at that very moment with all his agents, wholesalers and *chefs de comptoir*, with the aid of which he conquers the world, and Rothschild said, 'Moses Lump, you may have a single wish, whatever you want, it shall be done,' Doctor, I'm quite sure

Moses Lump would promptly reply, 'Polish my candelabra!' and Rothschild the Great would reply in wonderment: 'If I wasn't Rothschild, I'd want to be a Little Lump like this!'"

While Hyacinth developed his opinions in this way, at epic length, as he was wont to do, the Marquis arose from his pillow and strode toward us, still snorting several paternosters through his nose. Now Hyacinth drew the green gauze over the painting of the Madonna that hung above the bedpost, blew out the two wax candles that burnt before it, took down the copper crucifix, brought it back to us and polished it with the same rag and the same conscientious spit polish he applied to shine his master's spurs. The latter, however, looked as if his customary intensity had been dissolved by heat and mellowed by tenderness; in lieu of an overgarment he was wrapped in a wide, blue silk cloak with silver fringes, and his nose shimmered wistfully like a beloved louis d'or. "Oh Jesus!" he sighed as he let himself sink into the cushions of his sofa, "don't you think, my dear doctor, that I look positively inspired this evening? I'm very moved, my spirit is lightened, I can sense a higher state of being.

"The eye spies heaven's open gate,
With each beat, the heart doth celebrate!"

"Mr. Gumpel, you've got to eat," Hyacinth interrupted this pathetic declaration, "the blood in your intestines is dizzy again, I know what ails you."

"You know nothing," sighed the Master.

"I tell you, I know," the servant replied and nodded with his kindly, expressive little mug – "I know you through and through, I know you're the absolute opposite of me, when you're thirsty I'm hungry, when you're hungry I'm thirsty; you're too fat and I'm too skinny, you have a lot of imagination while I have all the more business sense, I'm pragmatic and you're diarrhetic, in short, you're my absolute antipode."

"Oh, Julia!" sighed Gumpelino, "If only I were the yellow kid-leather glove on your hand and could kiss your cheek! My dear doctor, did you ever see Crelinger in *Romeo and Juliet*?"

"Indeed I have, and I was enthralled, body and soul, by her performance."

“Well then,” the Marquis replied, well-pleased, fire shooting from his eyes and lighting up his nose, “then you understand me, then you know what it means when I tell you: I’m in love! Let me bare my soul to you. Hyacinth, leave us.”

“I don’t need to go out,” the latter responded in dismay, “you don’t need to be embarrassed in front of me, I also know love, and I already know.”

“You know nothing!” cried Gumpelino.

“Just to prove I know, Marquis, sir, I need only mention the name Julia Maxfield. Calm yourself, she loves you back – but it’s no use. The brother-in-law of your beloved won’t let her out of his sight and watches over her day and night like a diamond.”

“Oh, misery me,” Gumpelino whined, “I love and am loved in return, we secretly squeeze each other’s hands, we step on each other’s feet under the table, we drink each other up with our eyes, and yet the opportunity is lacking! How often do I stand in the moonlight on my balcony and imagine that I was myself Juliet, and my Romeo, or rather, my Gumpelino gave me a rendezvous, and I declaim just like Crelinger:

Come, night! Come, Gumpelino; come, thou day in night;
For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night
More white than new snow upon a raven’s back.
Come, gentle night; come, loving, black-browed night;
Give me my Romeo, or rather, Gumpelino.

But oh! Lord Maxfield keeps a tireless watch, and we two lovebirds die of longing! I will never live to see such a day’s night when, playing every pure blossoming seed, I win to lose. Oh, I’d rather live such a night than hit the jackpot in the Hamburg Lottery.”

“Bite your tongue!” cried Hyacinth, “The great lottery, one hundred thousand marks!”

“Yes, such a night would be worth more to me than the big jackpot,” Gumpelino raved on, “and oh, how many times has she already promised me such a night at the first opportunity, and I already imagined her declaiming in the morning just like Crelinger:

Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day.
It was the nightingale, and not the lark,
That pierced the fearful hollow of thine ear.
Nightly she sings on yond pomegranate tree.
Believe me, love, it was the nightingale.”

“The big jackpot for a single night of love!” Hyacinth kept on repeating all the while, and just could not believe his ears. “I have the greatest respect, Mr. Marquis, sir, for your cultivation, but I’d’ve never believed that you’d let your passions get the better of you. That love would be worth more than the big jackpot! Honestly, Mr. Marquis, ever since I cast in my lot with you as your servant a lot of your culture has rubbed off; but this much I know, I wouldn’t give even an eighth of the big jackpot for Love! God keep me from such madness! Even if I figure five hundred marks commission, I’d still have twelve thousand marks! Love! If I were to figure out all that love cost me it’d only add up to twelve marks and thirteen shillings. Love! I’ve had plenty of complimentary satisfaction in love that didn’t cost me a penny; every now and then I cut my ladylove’s foot corns out of kindness. Only once did I ever have a truly tender and passionate attachment, and that was with Fat Gudel from Muddy Bottom. The woman bought her lottery tickets from me, and when I came to update her investment she always pressed a hunk of cake into my hand, and a very good cake it was, and sometimes she’d even give me preserves, with a shot of liqueur, and when once I complained of being down in the dumps she gave me the recipe for a remedy her own husband used. I use that remedy to this very day, it always does the trick, there were no further ramifications to our love. Sometimes I think maybe, Mr. Marquis, you might need one of these remedies. The first thing I did when I got to Italy, I went to the apothecary in Milan and had him fix me up a batch of it, and I always have it with me. Hold on a minute, I’ll look for it, and whenever I look for something I find it, and when I find it, Your Excellency will take it.”

It would take too long for me to recapitulate the entire commentary with which the restless searcher accompanied every object he yanked out of his sack. The objects comprised: 1) half of a wax candle, 2) a silver case containing the instruments for removing foot corns, 3) a lemon, 4) a pistol, which, though not loaded,

was nevertheless wrapped in paper, perhaps so that the sight of it did not spark any dangerous fantasies, 5) a printed list of the last drawing of the great Hamburg Lottery, 6) a little black leather book containing the Psalms of David and outstanding debts, 7) a dried tuft of grass twisted almost into a knot, 8) a little package wrapped in faded pink taffeta containing the receipt for a lottery ticket that once won fifty thousand marks, 9) a flat piece of bread like white baked ship's biscuit with a small hole in the middle, and finally, 10) the aforementioned remedy, which the little man plucked out with considerable emotion and with a wistfully dumb-founded shake of the head.

"When I think," he sighed, "that Fat Gudel gave me this recipe ten years ago, and that I'm in Italy now and hold the selfsame prescription in my hands, and read the words again: '*sal mirabile Glauberei*,' which in plain German means extra-fancy, first-rate miracle salt – oh, it makes me feel like I'd just taken it myself and was already feeling the effect. What is Man! Here I am in Italy and I'm thinking of Fat Gudel from Muddy Bottom! Who'd've ever imagined! I can just imagine her at this very moment in the country in her garden, where the moon is glowing and, no doubt, a nightingale is singing, or maybe a lark."

"It was the nightingale and not the lark!" sighed Gumpelino and proceeded to declaim:

"Nightly she sings on yond pomegranate tree.
Believe me, love, it was the nightingale."

"It's all the same to me," Hyacinth continued, "as far as I'm concerned, let it be a canary, the birds you keep in your garden have the lowest upkeep. The main thing is the hot house, and the wall hangings in your pavilion and the figures standing in front; for instance, a naked commanding general of the gods and a Venus Urinarius, both of which cost three hundred marks. And in the middle of the garden Gudel has installed a fontanelle – and maybe she's standing there at this very moment picking her nose and getting all worked up thinking of me – oh!"

After the sigh came a wistful silence, which the Marquis finally interrupted with the anxious question, "Tell me on your honor, Hyacinth, do you really believe that your remedy will work?"

"On my honor, it will work," the latter replied. "Why shouldn't it work? It works

with me, doesn't it! And am I not a living, breathing man like you? Miracle salt makes all people equal, and if Rothschild takes miracle salt he feels the same effect as the lowest little jobber. I'll tell you exactly what's going to happen: I empty the powder into a glass, add water, stir, and as soon as you've drunk it down you make a face and say *Yuck!* After that you can hear for yourself how it spills about inside, and you feel kind of funny, and you lie down in bed, and I give you my word of honor, you'll get up again and lie down again and get up again and so on and so forth, and the next morning you feel as light as an angel with white feathers, and you dance around in the euphoria of healthfulness, looking just a little pale; but I know that you like to look languid and pale, and when you look languid and pale you're a sight for sore eyes."

Even though Hyacinth tried to convince him in this way and already went ahead and prepared the remedy, the whole effort would have been fruitless had the passage in which Juliet takes the fateful potion not suddenly popped into the Marquis' mind. "What do you think, Doctor, of Müller in Vienna? I saw her play the part of Juliet, and God! Oh God! How she could act! I'm the biggest fan of Crelinger, but Müller, when she downed the cup of poison, she just blew me away. Like this," he said, pulling a tragic expression as he picked up the glass into which Hyacinth had poured the powder, "like this, that's how she held the cup and shuddered, so that you could feel everything she felt when she uttered the words:

I have a faint cold fear thrills through my veins
That almost freezes up the heat of life!

"And so stood she as I now stand, and lifted the cup to her lips, and with the words:

Stay, Tybalt, stay!
Romeo, I come! This do I drink to thee,

she emptied the cup."

"Good health to you, Mr. Gumpel!" said Hyacinth in a fiery tone of voice, for the Marquis had, in ecstatic mimicry, downed the contents of the glass, and drained by the strain of his declamation, flung himself on the sofa.

But he did not stay horizontal very long; for all of a sudden someone knocked at the door, and in strode Lady Maxfield's little jockey, with a gracious bow handed the Marquis a missive and promptly bid farewell. Hastily the latter tore open the letter; as he read, his nose and eyes flashed with delight, but then suddenly a ghastly pallor spread all over his face, consternation twitched in his every muscle, with a look of despair he leapt up, laughed a wild laugh, ran around the room and cried out:

"Oh woe is me, unlucky lunatic!"

"What is it? What is it?" Hyacinth inquired in a trembling voice, and grasping the crucifix, which he'd set to polishing again, in his trembling hands, muttered, "Are we going to be robbed tonight?"

"What ails you, Marquis?" I asked, likewise more than a little bit taken aback.

"Read! Read!" cried Gumpelino, flinging the billet-doux at us and still racing desperately round the room, whereby his blue dressing gown fluttered around him like a storm cloud. "Oh woe is me, unlucky lunatic!"

In the missive we read the following words:

Sweet Gumpelino! At daybreak I must leave for England. My brother-in-law has already gone ahead and awaits me in Florence. I am now unchaperoned, but, alas, only this one night – let us make the best of it, let us drink the goblet of nectar that love holds forth down to the very last drop. I await you, I tremble . . .

Julia Maxfield

"Woe is me, unlucky lunatic!" Gumpelino yammered, "Love holds forth its goblet of nectar, and I, dear God! A fool for love, just downed the cup of miracle salts! Who will help me pump this wretched brew out of my gut? Help! Help!"

"No earthly mortal can help you now," sighed Hyacinth.

"I feel for your condition from the bottom of my heart," I likewise conveyed my condolences. "'Tis a bitter fate to forfeit the chalice of nectar for the glass of miracle salts! To trade in the throne of love for the *chaise percée*!"

"Oh Jesus! Oh Jesus!" the Marquis kept crying, "I feel it rushing through all my veins – you valiant apothecary! Your potion works lightning-quick, but I will not

let it keep me from my love, I'll hasten to her, fling myself at her feet and bleed to death!"

"Don't worry about your blood!" Hyacinth assured him, "You have no *Homeroids* to fret about. Get a hold of yourself!"

"No, no! I must to her, to her warm embrace. Oh night! Oh night –"

"I tell you," Hyacinth proceeded to reply with philosophical dispassion, "you will find no peace in her arms, twenty times or more you'll have to get up and go. Just get ahold of yourself. The more you jump around the room the more you lose control, the quicker the miracle salt takes effect. Your temperamental nature plays into nature's hand. What destiny ordains you must take like a man. That things turned out like this may be for the best, and it may be for the best that things turned out like this. Man is a mere mortal and does not fathom God's plan. Man often thinks he's headed for good fortune, and, maybe, on the way, misfortune strikes him with a stick, and when a common stick strikes a noble back, you feel it, Marquis."

"Oh woe is me, unlucky lunatic!" Gumpelino kept on raving, while his servant calmly kept on speaking:

"Many times Man expects a chalice of nectar and receives a pummel-soup instead, and if the nectar is sweet the pummeling is all the more bitter; and it's a good thing that the person who delivers the pummeling finally grows tired, else the recipient would never survive it. But it's all the more perilous when on the road to love, misfortune awaits with poison and a dagger's prick, so that you can't be sure of your life. Perhaps, Marquis, it's all for the best that things turned out like this, since, who knows, maybe you'd've rushed off to your lady love, and on the way, run into a little Italian with a six-foot-long blade and – perish the thought, better bite my tongue – the rascal pierced you, let's say, in the calf. This isn't Hamburg, after all, you can't very well cry out for help, there's no night-watchman in the Apennines. Or maybe," the unrelenting consoler continued without being fazed in the least by the Marquis' desperate state, "maybe, just when you were getting cozy with Lady Maxfield, the brother-in-law suddenly returned from his trip and held a loaded pistol to your breast and made you make out an IOU for a hundred thousand marks. Perish the thought, but I'm just saying what if: you being a handsome buck and Lady Maxfield being distraught at the thought of losing her handsome buck, and

jealous, as women get, at the thought of some other biddy enjoying you after her . . . So what does she do? She takes and squeezes a lemon or an orange and spikes it with a little white powder, and says: 'Refresh yourself, my love, you've run yourself ragged' – and the next morning they find you, a cool character indeed, cold and dead. There was a man, his name was Pieper, and he was having a secret tryst with a certain female commonly known as Chubby-cheeked Chick, and she lived on Kaffeemacherei Street and the man lived on the Fuhlentwiete."

"I wish," cried the Marquis, whose distress had reached a fever pitch, "that your Pieper from the Fuhlentwiete and your Chubby-cheeked Chick from the Kaffeemacherei, and you, Hirsch, and your Fat Gudel, all had my miracle salt swirling in your guts!"

"What do you want from me, Mr. Gumpel?" replied Hyacinth, getting hot under the collar. "Am I to blame that Lady Maxfield intends to leave town and that she invited you over tonight of all nights? Could I have foretold this turn of events? Am I Aristotle? Am I in the fortune-telling business? All I promised was that the remedy would work, and sure as my name is Hyacinth it does, and if you're so desperate and out of control and run back and forth in such a frenzy, it'll work all the quicker."

"Then I'll sit myself down quietly!" groaned Gumpelino, stamped with his feet on the floor, flung himself in a fury onto the sofa, tried hard to squelch his rage, and master and servant studied each other a long time in silence, till finally, following a long drawn-out sigh, the former muttered almost meekly to the latter:

"But Hirsch, what will the woman think of me if I don't come? She expects me at this very moment, why she even awaits me, she trembles, she burns with love."

"She does have a lovely foot," Hyacinth muttered under his breath and shook his little head sadly. But all the while his breast heaved mightily, and under his red robe a bold thought was brewing.

"Mr. Gumpel" – it finally spit itself out – "why not send me!"

With these words, a bright red blush spread over his pale officious face.

10.

When Candide arrived in Eldorado, he saw several boys on the street playing with big gold nuggets instead of stones. This luxury made him think that these were the

children of the king, and he was more than a little bit surprised when he learned that in Eldorado gold nuggets are just as worthless as the common pebbles schoolboys play with back home. Something similar happened to one of my friends, a foreigner, when he arrived in Germany and first read German books and was stunned at the wealth of ideas he found in them, but soon he realized that ideas are as common in Germany as gold nuggets in Eldorado, and that those writers whom he took for intellectual princes were just ordinary schoolboys.

This story comes to mind whenever I'm about to draft the loveliest reflections on art and life, and then I laugh to myself and keep the thoughts in the nib of my pen, or, in their place, sketch a picture or a little figure on the page, and convince myself that such wallpaper decorations are far more useful than the most golden ideas in Germany, the intellectual Eldorado.

On the wallpaper decorations I'm going to show you now, dear Reader, you will once again see the familiar mugs of Gumpelino and his Hirsch-Hyacinthos, and even if they be rendered with less precise features, I hope, nevertheless, that you will be sharp-witted enough to fathom their empty character without my having to lay it all on the line. Precision in this regard could cost me a lawsuit for defamation of character or worse. For the Marquis is wealthy and well-connected. Thus he is the natural ally of my enemies and supports them with subsidies, he is an aristocrat, Ultra-Papist, only something is lacking – though he'll have himself tuned-up soon enough – he's got the textbook take on inanity, as you'll presently see.

It's evening again, the table is bedecked with two candelabra, candles burning; their shimmer illumines the golden frames of the holy paintings hanging on the wall, whose subjects seem to come alive in the flickering light and shadow play. Outside, in front of the window, the somber cypress trees stand eerily motionless in the silver moonlight, and in the distance a sad little hymn to Mary is intoned in broken bits, as if sung by a sickly child. The room is sweltering hot, the Marquis Cristoforo di Gumpelino sits, or rather lies, stretched out in careless splendor on the cushions of the sofa, his noble sweating body is once again dressed in the thin blue silken dressing gown; in his hands he holds a book, its pages of reddish-saffron-colored paper with gilded edges, from which he declaims in a loud yet wistful voice. His eyes have a certain clammy luster the likes of which one finds in randy tomcats, and his cheeks and even his nostrils have a somewhat sickly pallor.

And yet, dear Reader, this pallor might well be explained from a philosophical-anthropological standpoint, considering the fact that the Marquis swallowed an entire glass of miracle salts the night before.

Hirsch-Hyacinthos, on the other hand, is squatting on the floor, and with a big piece of white chalk drawing something like the following in large-scale characters on the brown floor tiles:

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This business appears to be turning a bit sour for the little man; panting every time he bends down, he mutters, annoyed, “Spondee, trochee, iambus, annoy-us, anapest, what a pest!” For ease of movement, he has removed the red coat, which reveals two short humble little legs in tight scarlet pants and two somewhat longer haggard arms in white, baggy shirtsleeves.

“What are these curious characters?” I asked him, after watching these goings-on a while.

“These are feet, life-sized,” he panted by way of answer, “and I, a poor, harried man, must keep them in my head, and my hands are already aching from all these feet I have to keep writing out. These are the authentic, bona fide feet of poetry. If it weren’t for the sake of my cultivation, I’d let poetry run off with all its feet. But I’m taking private lessons in the art of poetry from the Marquis. The Marquis reads me the poems out loud and explains to me how many feet they’re made of, and I have to jot them down and then figure out if it’s made right.”

“As a matter of fact,” said the Marquis in a didactically strained tone of voice, “you find us engaged in a serious poetic pursuit. I am well aware, Doctor, that you are one of those headstrong poets who don’t agree that feet are the heart of the poetic art. But a cultivated sensibility can only be touched by a cultivated form, this we can only learn from the Greeks and from modern poets who act Greek, think Greek, feel Greek and in this way transmit their feelings to men of consequence.”

"It goes without saying that you would address a man, not a woman, as might an unclassical romantic poet," yours truly replied.

"Mr. Gumpel sometimes speaks like a book," Hyacinth whispered to me from the side of his mouth, pressed his thin lips shut, winked with his proudly contented little eyes and shook his awestruck little head. "Like a book he talks at times, I tell you," he added a little bit louder, "and when he does he's no mere mortal, you might say, but a higher being, and I'm struck dumb the more I listen."

"And what is it that you have in your hands at the moment?" I asked the Marquis.

"Jewels!" he replied and handed me the book.

At the word "jewels," Hyacinth leapt into the air; but when he saw nothing but a book, he smiled indulgently. This jewel of a book bore the following title on the cover page:

*Poems of Count August von Platen*<sup>49</sup>

The flip side bore this graceful inscription: "A present of warm brotherly friendship." The book itself was scented with that curious perfume not in the least related to eau de cologne, and perhaps to be ascribed to the fact that the Marquis had spent the whole night reading it.

"I couldn't close an eye all night," he proclaimed, "I was so very agitated, eleven times I had to climb out of bed, and, fortunately, I had this excellent reading matter, from which I not only drew poetic instruction, but also human comfort. You see how much I honored the book, not a single page is missing, and yet, when I sat as I sat, I was sometimes sorely tempted."

"Others may have felt so tempted too, Marquis."

"I swear on our beloved Lady of Loreto and on my good name," he continued, "these poems are one of a kind. Yesterday evening, as you know, I was downright desperate, *au désespoir*, as they say, when fate did not permit me to possess my Julia – then I read these poems, a poem at a time, every time I had to get up, and this made me feel such an indifference to women that my own pangs of love filled me with disgust. That is precisely what I like about this poet, that he only gets all fired up about his feelings of warmest friendship for men; he holds us superior to the female sex, and for this honor alone we ought to be grateful. In this he is greater than all other poets, he doesn't seek to please the common taste of the hoi polloi, he weans us of our passion for women that has brought us so much misery. – Oh

women! Women! He who frees us from your thrall is a champion of humanity. It's an eternal shame that Shakespeare did not turn his eminent theatrical talent to that end, since, as I read here for the first time, he is supposed to have harbored no less lofty feelings in this regard than the great Count Platen, who said of Shakespeare's sonnets:

"'Twas not the whimsies of mere girls that roused the heaving of your breast,  
But for the bonds of friendship found we see you strive in heated verse:  
Freed by your friend from woman's curse,  
And in his face found fame and sweet unrest."

While the Marquis declaimed these lines with heartfelt emotion, and the slippery words melted on his tongue, as it were, Hyacinth made the most contrary faces, at once vexed and parenthetical, and finally spoke up:

"Mr. Marquis, sir, you talk like a book, and you deliver these verses as smoothly as you did last night, but their meaning does not sit well with me. As a man, I'm flattered that Count Platen holds us higher than women, but, on the other hand, fond of women as I am, I don't take kindly to such a man. That's how we are! Some of us like onions, and others prefer warm feelings of friendship, and I must admit, if the truth be told, that I'm an onion man myself, and I'll take a crooked scullery maid over your bonniest bosom friend. Indeed, I must confess that I can't see what there is to love in the male of the species."

Hyacinth spoke these last words while studying himself in the mirror, but the Marquis was unperturbed and went right on reciting:

"The shelter of our hope's illusion falls apart,  
We try, but, oh! Forever must we stay apart;  
My name on your lips sounds melodic,  
But sadly must this lyric's longing stand apart;  
Our course, by custom and by duty bound,  
Like sun and moon, we're kept apart,  
But our two hearts make one sweet sound,  
Your dark hair and my pale face none can tell apart!  
But, oh! I dream, for far from me you're bound,



Ere bliss enjoyed, we pulled apart.  
If we were but two flowers wreathed  
And not the bleeding souls of bodies held apart!"

"Curious verse!" cried Hyacinth, who parroted the rhymes. "*By custom and by duty bound, our two hearts make one sweet sound, for far from me you're bound!* Such curious verse! My brother-in-law often makes a joke, when reciting poetry, of alternately slapping on the words 'from the front' and 'from the rear' at the end of each line; who'd have ever guessed that the resulting verse poems are called ghazals.<sup>50</sup> I've got to try it some time, to see if the poem that the Marquis just recited couldn't be made even nicer if every time, in alternation, after the word 'together,' one were to add 'from the front' and 'from the rear'; the resulting verse would definitely be twenty percent stronger."

Without paying heed to this chatter, the Marquis went right on reciting ghazals and sonnets in which the poet in love sings of his lovely friend, praises him, complains about him, accuses him of coldness, makes plans to get to him, makes eyes at him, makes jealousy soup, pines for him, lovingly plays a whole scale of tender notes, indeed so passionately, so obdurately and unctuously that one might well take the author for a man-crazed maid – only then it would sound a little strange that this maid keeps yammering that her love is deemed "indecent," that she is as bitterly hostile to "this intrusive sense of decency" as a pickpocket to the police, that she longs to lovingly embrace "the loins" of her friend, that she complains of "envious persons" who "join in secret to hinder and hold us apart," that she complains of the friend's painful offenses, that she assures him she only wishes to glimpse him in passing, swears that "not a syllable will scare your ear!" and finally admits:

"My wish awakened qualms in others' breasts,  
You did not lend an ear, but shook your head.  
Do you not share it too, by sweet love blessed!"

I must grant the Marquis this much; that he did an excellent job of reciting these poems, sighing on cue, groaning, slipping and sliding back and forth on the sofa, caterwauling, as it were, with his behind. Hyacinth never failed to faithfully

repeat the rhyme, even if every now and then he slipped in unseemly remarks. He paid closest attention to the odes. "You can learn a lot more from this sort," he said, "than from the sonnets and ghazals; since in odes the feet are printed at the top, so that you can more easily figure out each poem. Every poet ought to do as Count Platen does with his most difficult verse poems, print the feet at the top, in this way saying to his readers, 'You see, I'm an honest man, I'm not out to cheat you, these crooked and straight strokes I put in front of every poem are, so to speak, a metric accounting, and you can check how much effort it cost me; they are, in a manner of speaking, the measure of each poem, go ahead, check it out, and if a single syllable is missing you can call me a knave, so help me God.' But precisely because of this honest appearance, the reading public may be deceived. For if the feet are printed before the poem, you say to yourself: I don't want to be suspicious, why should I count after the poet, surely he's a man of honor, and so you don't check and you're cheated. And do you always have the time and leisure to check? Now that we're in Italy I have the time to write out the feet with chalk on the floor tiles and audit every ode. But back in Hamburg, where I have my own business to keep me busy, I just don't have the time, and I'd have to trust the Count without counting, just as you trust the money bags you get from the bank on which are printed how many hundred talers are contained within – these bags pass, sealed, from hand to hand, everyone trusts each other that the bag contains the amount it says it does, and yet there are cases in which an idler with time on his hands opened such a sack and counted the contents and found it came up a few talers short. For all I know, there may well be a fair bit of knavery in poetry too. Especially when I think about the money bags, I get suspicious. Why, my brother-in-law told me that a certain somebody presently sits in the Odensee prison, a fella who worked for the post office and illicitly opened the money bags that passed through his hands and pocketed some and sewed 'em back up again and sent 'em on. When you hear about sly doings like that you lose all faith in humanity and become a very suspicious person. There's so much slyness in the world nowadays, in poetry I'm quite sure as in every other business.

"Honesty," Hyacinth continued, while the Marquis kept right on reciting, without paying us any mind, completely entranced, "honesty, my dear doctor, is the most important thing, and any dishonest man is a scoundrel in my book, I won't

buy from him, I won't read from him, in short, I won't do business with him. I'm not a man given to self-flattery, Doctor, but if I were to flatter myself about something I'd flatter myself a little that I'm an honest man. I'll tell you about one of my noble qualities, and you'll be amazed – I tell you, amazed, on my word of honor. There's a man I know in Hamburg who lives on the Speersort. He's a greengrocer and his name is Cloddy, actually it's Clod, but I call him Cloddy, because we're good friends, but his real name is Clod. And his wife, Madame Clod, she never liked it that her husband played the lottery with me, so I couldn't ever bring the lottery ticket to his home, and he always said to me on the street: 'Put it on such and such a number, and here's the money, Hirsch!' And then I said: 'Okay, Cloddy,' and as soon as I got home I set aside his number in an envelope and wrote on the envelope in good German: For the Account of Mr. Christian Hinrich Clod. And now listen up and be amazed: it was a lovely spring day, and the trees in front of the stock market were all green, and the breezes were pleasant and the sun was shining in the sky, and I was standing there at the Hamburg Bank. And along comes Cloddy, my old pal Cloddy, arm in arm with his fat wife Madame Clod, and first he greets me and talks about God's glorious spring weather, and makes some kind of patriotic remarks about the army, and he asks me: How are things, and I tell him that just a couple of hours ago some guy was put in the pillory, and just like that he says to me: Last night I dreamt they'd pick Number 1538 in the Big Lottery – and at that very moment, while Madame Clod is admiring the Emperor's understudies at City Hall, he goes and presses a full thirteen louis d'or in my hand – I tell you, I can still feel their weight – and before Madame Clod can turn around again, I say: Okay, Cloddy! and make tracks. And I head directly, without any detours, straight to the lottery office and put the money on Number 1538, and put the ticket in an envelope as soon as I get home, and write on that envelope: For the Account of Mr. Christian Hinrich Clod. And what does God do? Fourteen days later, to test my honesty, he makes them pick Number 1538 with a purse of fifty thousand marks. So what does Hirsch do, the selfsame Hirsch who stands before you now? That Hirsch puts on a clean white shirt and clean white scarf and hires himself a carriage and rides to the lottery office to pick up his fifty thousand marks and rides with it to Speersort. And as soon as Clod sees me, he asks: 'Hirsch, why are you all gussied up today?' But me, I don't say a word, and just plunk a big surprise bag

full of money on the table and say in a festive tone of voice, 'Mr. Christian Hinrich Clod, the Number 1538, which you were so good as to have me lay your money on, had the good fortune of winning fifty thousand marks, which I have the honor of presenting you in this very bag, and permit me to make so bold as to request a receipt!' As soon as Cloddy hears this he starts crying, as soon as Madame Cloddy hears it she starts crying, the red-headed maid is crying, the stooped assistant is crying, and me? Emotional as I am, I couldn't cry and promptly fainted, and only after I came to did the tears run from my eyes like a bubbling brook, and I bawled for a full three hours."

The little man's voice trembled as he spoke, and right festively did he pluck the aforementioned bag out of his pocket, unwound the faded pink taffeta ribbon and showed me the signed note whereby Christian Hinrich Clod confirmed receipt of the fifty thousand marks. "When I die," said Hyacinth with a tear in his eye, "let them bury me along with this receipt, and when the time comes for me to stand up there on the Day of Reckoning and account for my deeds, then I will step proudly with this receipt in hand before the seat of the Almighty, and once my bad angel is through rattling off the misdeeds I committed in this world, and my guardian angel gets ready to read off the list of my good deeds, then I'll say, all calm and collected: "Silence! . . . Just tell me is this receipt in order? Is this the signature of Christian Hinrich Clod? Then a little bitty angel will come flying up and he'll say he knows Cloddy's signature like the back of his hand, and then he'll go and tell the amazing story of the honest deed I did. But the Creator, God the Eternal, the All-Knowing, who already knows everything, he remembers this story, and he praises me in the presence of the sun, the moon and the stars, and he promptly calculates in his head that if my misdeeds were subtracted from fifty thousand marks' worth of honesty, I'd still come out with a net gain, and then he says, 'Hirsch! I hereby dub thee an angel first class, and thou canst wear wings of red and white feathers.'"

11.

So who is this Count Platen whose acquaintance we made in the previous chapter as poet and warm friend? Oh, dear Reader, I could read this question on your lips and only with a reluctant shudder dare I proceed to answer. This is precisely the misfortune of German writers, that they must first acquaint their readers, through



dry character description and personal profile, with every genial or nasty nutcase they wish to pass under scrutiny, so as, first off, to establish that this person exists, and second, to situate the target spot, below or above, front or rear, before cracking the whip. It was different among the ancients, and it's still different today among more modern peoples, as, say, for instance, the English and the French, who have a folklife, and can, therefore, be said to have a public character. We Germans, on the other hand, are mad in general, but have few first-class lunatics well-known enough to site as universally familiar figures in prose or verse. The few men of this sort we possess have every right to make a big to-do about themselves. They are of inestimable value and are justified in laying claim to the greatest pretensions. So, for instance, His Excellency, Privy Counselor Schmalz, Professor of the University of Berlin, is well worth his weight in gold; a humorist could not do without him, and he himself feels this sense of self-importance and indispensability to such a high degree that he takes advantage of every opportunity to feed humorists stuff for satire, pondering day and night how best to make himself a laughing stock as statesman, public servant, dean, anti-Hegelian, patriot, and thereby, to actively promote the cause of literature, for which, as it were, he sacrifices himself. Indeed, one must grant German universities this much, that, more than any other guild, they supply the German writer with a plethora of lunatics to depict, and in this regard I have always particularly valued Göttingen. And this is the unspoken reason I support the preservation of universities, even though I have always advocated the free pursuit of trades and the dissolution of guilds. In light of the current palpable paucity of first-class lunatics, readers cannot thank me enough if I present a few more for public scrutiny. So, for the sake of literature, let me now speak at somewhat greater length about August Count von Platen-Hallermund. I hope, hereby, to contribute to his rightful renown and to make him somewhat famous; to this end, I will literarily fatten him up, so to speak, as the Iroquois do with the captives they look forward to feeding on at a future festivity. I will proceed in an absolutely faithful manner, stay true to the facts, maintain an altogether civil tone, as befits a proper bourgeois, and only touch upon the material, and treat the so-called personal details insofar as they help shed light on intellectual matters, and I will always acknowledge the locus from which I considered him and sometimes even the lens through which I looked at him.

The locus from which I first considered Count Platen was Munich, the scene of

his doings, where he is well-known to all who know him, and where he will surely remain immortal as long as he lives. The lens through which I looked at him came courtesy of several Munich residents who, every now and then, at merry moments, made a merry remark about his outward appearance. I myself never met him, and when I wish to call his person to mind, still remember the comic fury with which my friend, Dr. Lautenbacher, once lashed out at poetic shenanigans in general, and in particular, at a certain Count Platen, who, with a laurel wreath on his head, stood in the path of strollers on the public promenade to Erlangen, and gazing with bespectacled nose at the heavens, shammed poetic ecstasy. Others spoke more kindly of the poor Count and only lamented his limited talent, which, given his ambition to at least excel as a poet, compelled an excess of zeal, and they praised, in particular, his obliging manner with younger men, with whom he was modesty incarnate, when, with the most amiable humility he begged leave to be allowed every now and then to come to their bedrooms, and carried the kindness so far as to come again and again, even when the incommodiousness of his visits was made perfectly clear to him. Accounts of this sort stirred me to a certain extent, although I found this lack of personal approval quite natural. In vain, the Count often complained:

“ – Your sweet blond youth, dear boy,  
Disdains his melancholy friend,  
Oh would that I to merriment could tend,  
And not with swallowed tears sham joy,  
And so, for my heart’s sake, will I enjoin  
Heaven’s help your heart to bend.”

In vain, the poor Count gave his own personal assurance that he would one day be the most celebrated poet, that the shadow of a laurel leaf was already visible on his brow, that he could likewise make his sweet boys immortal through his timeless poems. Forsooth, even such celebrity was favored by none, and in truth it was hardly enviable. I still recall with what squelched snickers a candidate for such celebrity was once treated by a few of his merry young friends under the arcades in Munich. A sharp-sighted scoundrel went so far as to suggest that he’d espied the

shadow of a laurel leaf between the candidate's coattails. As for me, dear Reader, I'm not as nasty as you think, I pity the poor Count when others scoff at him, I doubt that he actually avenged himself for the hateful "norm," even though in his songs he longs to surrender to such sweet revenge, but I do believe in the painful offenses, humiliating rejections and snubs of which he himself sings so movingly. I'm convinced that he comported himself in a far more praiseworthy manner in the face of social norms than he'd have liked, and he can perhaps boast, like General Tilly: "I never lost my head to wine, never touched a woman, and never lost in battle." Which is, no doubt, why the poet says of him:

"Thou art a prudent, modest youth."

No one in Germany is more fairly inclined to poetic creations, and of course I gladly and wholeheartedly grant a poor man like Platen his ounce of fame that he earns so miserably by the sweat of his brow. No one is more inclined than I to extol his efforts, to praise his zeal and his poetic erudition, and to acknowledge his syllabic accomplishments. My own attempts make me, more than anyone else, qualified to honor the metric accomplishments of the Count. The painstaking strain, the infinite perseverance, the nightly, wintry teeth-clattering, the fervent efforts he puts into chiseling his verses is more apparent to a fellow versifier than to the ordinary reader, to whom the smoothness, grace and polish of the Count's verses may look simple, and who is mindlessly entertained by the slick wordplay, just as we may be likewise amused for a couple of hours by acrobats who walk the tightrope, dance over eggs and stand on their heads, without fathoming that these poor souls took years of duress and stomach-gnawing starvation to master such supple arts, such a metrically measured life. I, who did not take such pains with the poetic art and always practiced it in tandem with a tasty meal, all the more commend Count Platen who had a more grueling and hungering time of it; let me say, to his credit, that no tightrope walker in Europe can balance as well as he on slack ghazals, nor execute as well as he the egg-dance over

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and that no one can stand on his head nearly as well as the Count. Even if the Muses do not favor him, he still has a grip on the genius of language, or rather, knows how to grip it by the throat; since the free love of language eludes him, he is likewise obliged to be assiduous in pursuit of this youngster too, and he is only able to grasp the external form, which, despite its lovely figure, can never reveal a noble sentiment. Never has a natural note, the like of which we find in folk songs and in the utterances of children and other poets, spewed forth or blossomed in a burst of epiphany from the soul of a Platen; the terrible strain he is obliged to put himself under for the sake of utterance he calls a "great feat in words." Altogether unfamiliar with the nature of poetry, he does not even know that the word is only a deed to the orator, but to the true poet it is an event. Unlike the way it is for the true poet, language never became his internal master, but he became a master of language, or rather he imposed his mastery like a virtuoso on an instrument. The more accomplished he became in his technical mastery, the more convinced he became of his virtuosity; since he knew how to play every which way, he versified the most complex passages, he sometimes, as it were, restricted his poeticizing to the G-string and was annoyed when the public failed to applaud. Like all virtuosos who develop such a one-sided talent, he strived only for applause, and, peeved to observe the fame of others, he envied his colleagues for their success, as he did Clausen, for instance, immediately writing a five-act lampoon, if only to deflect an epigram of blame for himself. He controlled all reviews in which others were praised, and kept hollering nonstop: "I am not enough praised, not enough rewarded, for I am the Poet, the Poet of Poets, etc." No true poet ever showed himself so hungry and thirsty for praise and alms, not Klopstock, not Goethe, to whose ranks Count Platen promoted himself as third of a triumvirate, although, as anyone can see, he makes a more fitting triumvirate with Ramler and perhaps A.W. von Schlegel. The great Ramler, as he was known in his day, when, albeit minus the laurel wreath on his noggin, but with all the more lengthy a tail and plentiful a head of hair, he raised his eyes to heaven, and with a buckram umbrella under his arm, ambled around the Berlin zoo scanning verses, considered himself the representative of Poetry on earth. His verses were the most accomplished in German letters, and his admirers, into the ranks of which even a Lessing strayed, believed that poesy had reached its pinnacle. Much the same assessment was later made



of A.W. von Schlegel, whose poetic flaws, however, become more apparent as our poetic language grows more cultivated, so that those who once held the singer of “Arion” for an Arion himself now merely see the meritorious schoolteacher in him. But whether Count Platen is already entitled to laugh at the otherwise praiseworthy Schlegel, as the latter once laughed at Ramler, this I can’t say. But this much I do know, in poesy the three are alike, and even if Count Platen manages so smartly in his ghazals to pull off his wobbly balancing act, and in his odes to do a capital egg-dance, and indeed, in his light comedies to stand on his head – that doesn’t make him a poet. Even the ungrateful manly youth whom he so tenderly celebrates in song agrees that he is no poet. That he’s no poet, the women agree, even though – I must add in his defense – they may not be altogether impartial, and perhaps, on account of the disinterest they detect in him, they feel jealousy or even, due to this tendency in his poems, a threat to their heretofore privileged position in society. Stern critics armed with sharp spectacles concur in this judgment or put it far more laconically. “What qualities do you find in the poems of Count von Platen-Hallermund?” I recently asked just such a gentleman. “Perseverance!” was the answer. “You mean in regard to the painstakingly shaped form?” I replied. “No,” retorted the latter, “perseverance in the subject too.”

As to the subject of Platen’s poetry, though I would not praise the poor Count for it, I would not necessarily make him the butt of censorial outrage either of the sort that seethes in our cantons or calls for silence. *Chacun son gout*, to each his own, some favor the ox, others some mawkish moo-cow. I even question the terrible Rhadamanthine<sup>51</sup> rigor with which the content of Platen’s poems is condemned in the *Berliner Yearbooks for Scientific Critique*. But that’s what people are like, it’s very easy for them to get all worked up about sins that wouldn’t give them any pleasure. In *The Morgenblatt*, I recently read an article entitled: “From the Journal of a Reader,” in which Count Platen speaks out with his characteristic reserve in response to such stern critics of his amicable camaraderie, which he never completely denies and by which we can recognize him here too. When he claims that *The Hegelian Weekly* accused him of a secret vice with *ludicrous pathos* he wishes thereby, as we may easily surmise, merely to forestall the reproof of others, whose disposition he bids a third party to ascertain. In any case, he has been ill-advised, I would never, in this regard, allow myself to be accused of pathos, the noble Count

is, rather, an amusing phenomenon, and in his vaunted proclivity I see nothing but an untimely tendency, the faintheartedly bashful parody of antique wanton ways. It is, after all, a fact that the aforementioned proclivity did not run contrary to the morals of antiquity and were proclaimed with heroic forthrightness. When, for instance, the Emperor Nero threw a feast that must have cost a couple million on a vessel laden with gold and ivory, he had his union duly consecrated with a member of the seraglio of boys by the name of Pythagoras (*cuncta denique spectata quae etiam in femina nox operit*<sup>52</sup>) and, thereafter, set fire to the City of Rome with the wedding torch so as to sing all the better of the fall of Troy to the accompaniment of the sputtering flames. That was one ghazal-poet of whom I could speak with pathos; I can only chuckle about this new Pythagorean, who needily and prudently and fearfully creeps along the paths of friendship, scorned by heartless youth and afterwards sobs out his little ghazals by the pitiful light of little oil lamps. It is interesting in this regard to compare the measly poetry of Platen to that of Petronius. That latter's work is full of gruff, antique, plastic, pagan forthrightness; Count Platen, on the other hand, despite his boasts of classicality, rather treats his subject romantically, in a veiled, wistful, priestly manner. For the Count sometimes disguises himself in pious sentiments, he avoids the more precise designation of sex; only the initiated are allowed to see things clearly; he imagines that he has sufficiently hidden his true intentions from the hoi polloi by leaving out the word "friend" from time to time, and at such times he does like the ostrich, who believes himself hidden when he's stuck his head in the sand, so that only the bum remains visible. Our highborn bird would have done better to have hid his bum in the sand and have shown us his head. In truth, he's more of a man of bum than a man of mind, the word man doesn't suit him at all, his love has a passive Pythagorean character, he's a pathic in his poems, he's a woman, and what's more, a woman who delights in the womanly, he is, so to speak, a manly tribade.<sup>53</sup> This fearfully submissive nature reveals itself in all his love poems, he always finds a new beloved friend, throughout his poems we see polyandry, even when he sentimentalizes:

"You love and yet are still – oh, had I too kept still  
And only cast wan looks your way!!  
If only I had never asked you the time of day,

Then would I not now swallow such a bitter pill!  
But let the ardor of such love never be stilled,  
And may it ne'er run cold, I pray!  
For from yon realm eternal did it spill,  
Where blessed angels with angels play."

We immediately think of the angels who came to Lot, the son of Harran, and only managed by hook and by crook to elude the gentlest of advances, as we may read in the *Pentateuch*, in which, alas, the ghazals and sonnets composed at Lot's door were not included. Everywhere in Platen's poems we see the ostrich that only hides its head, the vain, cowering bird decked out with the most resplendent plumage but unable to fly, that cantankerously hobbles over the polemical sands of the literary desert. With his lovely feathers incapable of flight, with his lovely verses that never soar, he is the contrary of that eagle of song with less resplendent wings but able to swing himself up to the sun – I must come back to the same refrain: Count Platen is no poet.

But it may be that Count Platen would be a poet if he lived in another era and if, moreover, he were someone other than who he is. The dearth of the natural in the Count's poems is somewhat stirring, precisely perhaps because he lives at a time when he cannot call his true feelings by their name, when the same morality that forever stands in opposition to his love even forbids him to give unveiled vent to his laments, when he must fearfully mask every feeling so as not with a single syllable to ruffle the ear of the public with its fondness for "pretty prudery." This fear prevents him from giving vent to any natural sounds of his own, it condemns him to metrically rework the sentiments of other poets as immaculate found material, as it were, and, of necessity, to silence his own feelings. We may well do him an injustice, if, in failing to recognize such an unfortunate condition, we contend that Count Platen sought to lay claim to poetic nobility and prove himself a count of poesy too, and, therefore, restricted himself to expressing the feelings of illustrious families, feelings validated by their sixty-four accredited ancestors. Had he lived in the time of the Roman Pythagoras, he would perhaps have given freer reign to his feelings, and might possibly have counted as a poet. Then at least the natural notes would not be lacking in his lyrical poems – even though there would still be the absence of characters in his dramas, so long as his sensual nature

does not also change and he does not become, as it were, someone else. For the kind of characters I'm thinking of are those independent creatures that emerge fully formed and clad in armor from the creative poet's soul, like Pallas Athena from the head of Zeus, living breathing dream-beings, whose mystical birth, more than one might believe, is wondrously directly linked to the sensual nature of the poet, so that the capacity for such spiritual delivery is denied to him, who, but a barren creature himself, can only give himself in the ungainly ghazals of his windy weakness.

But these are only the private opinions of a poet, and their weight depends on how much store you put in his competence. I cannot help but note here that Count Platen often assured the public that he would compose his most significant poems at some point in the future, works of which we cannot now conceive, indeed that he would only get around to composing *Iliads* and *Odysseys*, classical tragedies and other immortal colossal poems once he'd adequately prepared himself with so-and-so many trials. Perhaps, dear Reader, you have yourself read these gushes of gumption in tiresomely labored verses, and the promise of such a rosy future seemed all the more tantalizing, in light of the Count's depiction at the same time of all Germany's poets, save old Goethe, as a pack of pitiful scribblers who just stood in his way on the road to fame and fortune, and shamelessly plucked the laurels and rewards which he alone deserved.

I'll skip over what I heard them say about it in Munich; but for the sake of chronology, I must mention that at that time the King of Bavaria expressed his intention of granting some German poet an annual stipend without linking this largesse to any administrative post, which unusual instance could have a positive impact on the whole of German literature. So it was said . . .

But let me not stray from my subject, I was speaking of the bragging of Count Platen, who kept crying: "I am the poet, the poet of poets! I will compose *Iliads* and *Odysseys*, etc." I don't know what the public makes of such blustering, but I do know for a fact what one poet thinks of it, a true poet who has already known the subdued sweet and secret thrill of poesy, and like a contented page who enjoys the clandestine favors of a princess, would surely not brag about it in the marketplace.

Count Platen has often already been mocked for such boastfulness, and, like



Falstaff, he always made apologies. For such apologies he manifests a talent, extraordinary in its manner, that merits a special recognition. That is, that for each of his own flaws, Count Platen has the knack of finding a trace of it, however small, in some great personage, and on account of such flawed affinity, compares himself to said greats. Of Shakespeare's sonnets, for instance, he makes a point of saying that they are directed at a young man and not a woman, and on account of such a sensible choice he praises Shakespeare, compares himself to him – and that is all that he has to say about him. One might well write a negative apology for Count Platen and maintain that he has not yet been impugned for such and such a failing because he has not yet compared himself to such and such an illustrious personage guilty of that flaw. He proves himself most adroit and admirable in his choice of personage in whose life he finds immodest statements and by whose example he seeks to legitimize his own braggadocio. Indeed, the words of this particular personage have never been cited in this regard – for it is no one less than Jesus Christ himself, who, heretofore, always served as the very epitome of humility and modesty. Would Christ have ever bragged, that most modest of men, all the more modest in that he was the godliest? Indeed, Count Platen discovered what all previous theologians missed, for he insinuates: Christ wasn't modest either when standing before Pilatus, nor did he give modest answers, but rather, when asked if he was king of the Jews, replied: if you say so. And that's just what Count Platen says too, "It's me, I am the poet!" What no hate-filled enemy of Christ ever managed, this exegete of narcissist vanity succeeded in pulling off.

Just as we know what to think when someone keeps yelling, "I am the poet!" so, too, do we know what impact this declaration is likely to have on the altogether extraordinary poems that the Count will one day compose, once he has attained the proper ripeness, poems that will greatly surpass in their profundity the masterpieces he has produced to date. We know all too well that the later works of the true poet are by no means more important than his earlier efforts, just as with a woman, the supposition that the more often she bears child the more complete are the children she brings into the world; no, the first child is just as finished as the second – only the birth-giving gets easier. The lioness does not first whelp a little hare, then a puppy and finally a lion cub. Madame Goethe fawned a little lion in

her first labor, and he gave us his lion of Berlichingen at the first toss. In the same way, Schiller tossed off his *Robbers*, in whose claws one already recognized the lion's way. Later came the polish, the smoothness, the refinement of *The Natural Daughter* and *The Bride of Messina*. This is now how things transpired with Count Platen, who commenced with the most timid artistic tinkering, of which the poet sings:

“You, who sprang full-grown from nothingness,  
With licked and lacquered face,  
Look like a plaything carved of cork.”

And yet, if I may reveal my innermost thoughts, let me confess that I don't take Count Platen for such a consummate madman, as one might suppose from his boastfulness and constant self-touting. A touch of madness, it's true, always goes hand in hand with poesy; it would be dreadful if nature dished out such an appreciable portion of madness, enough for a hundred great poets, to a single soul, and only granted that soul such an insignificantly paltry dose of poesy. I have reasons to suspect that the Count does not even believe his own boasting, and that, deficient in life as in literature, it is, rather, some pressing personal imperative of the moment that impels him to act as his own ballyhooing Ruffiano, in literature as in life. Ergo, in both realms, we are faced with phenomena of which it can be said that they afford more psychological than aesthetic interest. Ergo this insufferably self-pitying prostration of the soul in tandem with this false pride. Ergo the pitiful paucity of output linked with impending death and the threatened surfeit linked with promised immortality. Ergo the burning beggar's pride and the overbearing obsequiousness. Ergo the constant complaints “that Cotta lets him starve.” Ergo the fits of Catholicism, etc.

As to the holy men of the cloth, whose pious anger manifested itself at the same time, and not only on account of my anti-celibate poems, but also because of the *Political Annals* I published at the time, it can only likewise be to my advantage for the public to see clearly that I am not in their camp. If I hereby imply that nothing laudable has been said of them, I'm not for that matter speaking ill of them either. I am even of the opinion that it is only for love of goodness that they

seek, through pious deceit and godly slander, to weaken the word of the wicked, and that it is only to serve such a noble end, which justifies any means, that they seek to block not only the spiritual, but also the material livelihood of said sinners. These kindly folk who even set themselves up as a congregation in Munich were ill-advisedly honored with the name of Jesuits. They cannot possibly be true Jesuits, or else they would have recognized that the worst that can be said of me, for instance, as one of the wicked, is that I've mastered the art of literary alchemy, by which I turn my enemies into ducats, such that I derive the ducats and they the thrashings. They would have recognized that such thrashings forfeit none of their force, even if the name of the thrasher is revealed, just as the poor sinner does not feel the blow of the broomstick any the less if the one dishing out the punishment is declared dishonest. And, above all, they would have recognized that a fondness for the anti-aristocratic Voss and a few harmless Mother-of-God jokes, for which they initially accused me of muck and foolishness, did not derive from any anti-Catholic inclination. Surely, they are no Jesuits, but rather, only hybrids of muck and foolishness, which I am as little disinclined to hate as much as a dung cart and the ox that drags it, and who, with all their efforts, merely succeed in effectuating the contrary of their intent, thus compelling me to prove just how Protestant I am, to put my good Protestant right, in the broadest sense of the word, into practice and wield the good Protestant battle-axe with all my heart. They could then, in any case, get their personal poet to spin a couple of the old wives tales about my atheist tendencies into verses to win over the plebs – among the familiar roster of whipping boys, they might already recognize a Luther, a Lessing or a Voss. Of course, I wouldn't swing the old battle-axe with the fervor of these heroes – as the sight of my enemies makes me laugh, and I have a touch of Eulenspiegel<sup>54</sup> in me and love to mix in a little malarkey – but I wouldn't strike these dung-oxen any the less lightly round the ears, even if I'd wreath my axe in flowers of tomfoolery.

But let me not wander too far from my subject. I believe it was about that time that the King of Bavaria, according to his aforementioned intention, awarded Count Platen an annual stipend of six hundred guldens, and not, moreover, from the public treasury, but rather from the king's own private funds, as a personal favor to the Count, just as the latter might have wished. I mention this case, so characteristic of the noble caste, as negligible in importance as it might seem,

only as a point of interest for the natural scientist who may perhaps be collecting observations on the aristocracy. Science must take every case into consideration. Whoever may impute that I take Count Platen too seriously, let him go to Paris and see how painstakingly the refined and elegant Professor Cuvier describes the filthiest insect in precise detail. For that reason I regret that I cannot establish the precise date of the granting of those six hundred guildens; but this much I do know, that Count Platen completed his *King Oedipus* before receiving the stipend and that the play would not have been so biting if its author had had more to bite on.

In Northern Germany, where I returned upon the sudden death of my father, I finally beheld the monstrous creation that crawled at long last out of the big egg upon which the fine-feathered ostrich had sat so long, and which the night owls of that congregation had already greeted with pious croaking and the aristocratic peacocks with merry counsel far in advance of its birth. It proved to be nothing less pernicious than a blasted basilisk. Dear Reader, do you know the legend of the basilisk? The legend goes that when a male bird lays an egg, like a female, a poisonous creature is born, whose breath pollutes the air, and who can only be killed if a mirror is held before it, whereupon at the sight of its own ugliness, it dies in a state of shock.

Sacred sadness, which I did not want to desecrate, compelled me to hold off reading *King Oedipus* until two months later, when I went to bathe on the Island of Helgoland, and there, cheered by the constant sight of the great surging sea, the petty attitude and fiddle-faddle of the highborn author became painfully apparent. This masterpiece finally revealed him to me in all his glory, with all his blossoming decay, his surfeit of intellectual limitations, his illusions without the power of illusions, just as he is, forced without force, piqued without being piquant, a dried-up water sprite, a sad lad of pleasure. This troubadour of woe, enfeebled in body and soul, attempted to imitate the mightiest, most imaginative and witty of young Hellenic poets. Nothing indeed is more repulsive than this painful impotence that seeks to puff itself up in the guise of audacity, these painstakingly assembled invectives, covered with the mold of some attenuated grudge, and this syllabic-prickly, timorous, imitation intellectual racket. It goes without saying that the Count's work does not reveal a trace of that idea of world annihilation that underlies every comedy of Aristophanes and that shoots out like a fantastic-ironic magic tree bedecked with blossoming intellectual jewels, singing nightingale nests



and clambering monkeys. We could not, of course, expect of the Count any such concept complete with death's delight and the fireworks of annihilation that goes with it. As with his *Guilty Fork*, the focus, preliminary and final points, basis and purpose of this so-called comedy once again consists in insignificant literary squabbling; the poor Count was only able to mimic a few extraneous aspects of Aristophanes' plays, namely the refined verse and vulgar words. Like a hollering housewife he pours flowerpots full of invectives on the heads of German poets. I will gladly pardon the Count for his rancor, but he should really have shown some regard. He should at least have honored our sex, since we are not women, but, rather, men, and so belong to a sex, which, according to his way of thinking, is the more lovely and which he so adores. Given this persistent lack of circumspection, some admired lad might doubt the sincerity of his praises, since we are all inclined to feel that the true lover of truth must honor the entire sex. The poet Frauenlob surely never let a vulgar word slip from his lips concerning any woman, and, so, a Platen ought to be more respectful of men. But our indelicate friend! – he shamelessly tells the public: we poets in Northern Germany, we all have “scabies, for which, alas, the one salve that will do, is more mephitic than the bum of babies.” The rhyme is good. Platen proves himself the most indelicate against Immermann. Already at the beginning of his poem he has the latter do things behind a Spanish screen, which, though undeniable, I dare not mention. I even consider it likely that Immermann did, indeed, do such things in the past. But it is characteristic that the imagination of Count Platen even listens in *a posteriori* to the intimate doings of his enemies. He did not even spare Houwald, that kind soul, soft as a maiden – indeed, perhaps, it is precisely because of the latter's gracious femininity that Platen hates him. And Müllner, whom, as he says, he has long since “mightily laid low with true wit,” this dead man is once again dragged out of his grave. Child and grandchild are not spared. Raupach is a Jew,

“The little Jew Raupel – ”  
Who, renamed Raupach, now holds high his nose.”

“Who smears tragedies in a drunken hangover.” The “baptized Heine” fares far worse. Yes, indeed, you didn't hear wrong, dear Reader, it's me he means, and in *King Oedipus* you can read how I'm a real Jew, how, after spending several hours

writing love songs, I sit myself down and hasten to circumsise ducats, how on the Sabbath I huddle with long-bearded muttering Jews and sing the Talmud, how on the eve of Easter I slaughter an underage Christian and, out of malice, always select a miserable writer to sacrifice – no, dear Reader, I will not lie to you, such lovely elaborate images are not to be found in *King Oedipus*, for the lack of which alone I find fault. On occasion, Count Platen has the best of motives and does not know how to make use of them. If only he had a bit more imagination he would at least have depicted me as a covert pawnbroker; what comic scenes such a premise might have permitted! It pains me deeply to see how the poor Count lets slip every opportunity for a good joke! How deliciously he might have used Raupach as a tragic Rothschild from whom the stage-royals made their loans! Through a few slight modifications in the play's storyline he might likewise have made better use of Oedipus, the key protagonist of his comedy. Instead of having him kill his father Laius and marry his mother Jocasta, he should, quite the contrary, have had Oedipus kill his mother and marry his father. A Platen ought to have masterfully pulled off the drastic dramatic twist of such a poetic work, his own sentimental inclination would, thereby, have stood him in good stead; he would only have, every now and then, to sing like a nightingale of the stirrings in his own breast; he would have delivered a play which, if the late *ghazalamented* Iffland still lived, would definitely have immediately been staged in Berlin and would still be performed today in private theaters. I can think of no one more perfect to play the lead role of such an Oedipus than the actor Wurm.<sup>55</sup> He would have outdone himself. Furthermore, I do not find it expedient that the Count assures us in his comedy that he possesses “true wit.” Or is he perhaps counting on the surprise effect, the theatrical coup of keeping the public forever waiting for that wit and still withholding it at the end? Or does he rather hope to spur on the public to seek out the true hidden wit, so that the whole thing is nothing but a game of blindman's bluff in which the Platenic wit is sly enough never to permit itself to be caught? This might explain why the public, ordinarily inclined to laugh at a comedy, remains so ill-humored while reading Platen's play; it just can't find the hidden wit. In vain does the sequestered wit pipe up ever louder, “Here I am! Really I'm here!” In vain, for the public is stupid and purses its lips. But I, who know where the wit is hiding, laughed heartily when I read the words of the “noble, power-hungry poet,” who

cloaks himself in an aristocratic nimbus, who boasts “that every breath that slips through his teeth is a pulverization,” and who proclaims to all German poets:

“Yes, just like Nero, I’d wish you all a single brain,  
Which, with one comic jab, I’d split asunder.”

The verse is bad. But here lies the hidden punch-line: that the Count, in fact, wishes that we were all Neros and he, on the other hand, our lone beloved friend Pythagoras.

Perhaps, for the Count’s sake, I ought to ferret out and praise some other hidden point of wit, but since in *King Oedipus* he attacks me in that which is nearest and dearest to me – and what could be nearer and dearer to me than my Christianity? – then let me not be blamed, if, being only human, I am inclined to take his Oedipus, “that great deed in words,” somewhat less seriously than the Count’s earlier activities.

In the meantime, true merit always finds its due, and the author of this Oedipus will not forego his, although, here too, as always, he only heeds the counsel of his noble and priestly cheering section. Indeed, the peoples of the Orient and the Occident have an age-old saying that everything, good or bad, that goes around comes around. And that day will come – get ready, dear Reader, for I’m about to heat things up in grisly detail – the day will come when they emerge from the Tartaros, those terrible daughters of the night, the Eumenides. I swear on the River Styx! – by which we gods never swear in vain – the day will come when they appear, those dark, iniquitous sisters, they will appear with snake-locked, raging red faces, with the same snake-lashes with which they once lashed Orestes, that unnatural sinner who slew his mother, the Tyndarite, Clytemnestra. Perhaps the Count already hears the snakes hissing now – I bid you, dear Reader, picture wolves’ den and devil’s music – perhaps he is even now gripped with the secret dread of the sinner, the sky darkens, night birds crawl, distant thunder rolls, lightning strikes, it smells of rosin. Beware! Beware! The exalted ancestors rise from their graves, they cry yet again three or four times, Beware! Beware! at their pitiful heir, they entreat him to put on their old iron britches to protect himself against the terrible rod – for the Eumenides will skin him alive with it, those lashing snakes will take

ironic delight, and like the lewd King Roderigo, when he was locked in a tower of snakes, the poor Count will likewise whimper and wail:

“Oh, they gnaw and, oh, devour,  
Wherewith, mostly I did sin.”

Don't be dismayed, dear Reader, it's all just a joke. These terrifying Eumenides are nothing but the stuff of a merry comedy, which I plan to polish up and publish, in due time, under the above title. Those tragic verses that just frightened you were lifted from the merriest book in the world, *Don Quixote de la Mancha*, in which a respectable old lady-in-waiting recites them in the presence of the entire court. I can see that you're smiling again. Let us take leave of each other with a hearty laugh. If this last chapter was a bit tiresome it was only the fault of the subject; I wrote it more to instruct than to entertain, and if I succeeded in putting a new lunatic to good use for the cause of literature, then the Fatherland will owe me a debt of gratitude. I made the field arable for wittier writers to seed and harvest. The humble recognition of this achievement is my sweetest reward.

In the eventuality that any monarchs would like to further repay me with a snuffbox, be advised that the book dealer Hoffman and Campe in Hamburg has been instructed to accept receipt on my behalf.

*Written in the late fall of the year 1829.*